

The Power of Voices

by Ingrid Neitsch, PDG, ARRFC, Zone 28W

How important is peace to you?

Every day, images of unrest and protest are broadcast into our homes. Many of the stories shock us. Our instincts compel us to offer comfort. We understand that conditions of peace are essential to the survival of humanity. We urgently want to “do something!” But what? We may despair, thinking that a single act is insignificant. Yet we know that’s not true. In all our Rotary work, one voice raises an issue, many voices activate change.

Along with fellow Rotarians and university partner representatives, I recently heard an array of voices as I participated in the extensive review process of 800 applications for the Rotary Peace Fellowships. Those applicants included the first female commander of the army in her country, an asylum officer with Homeland Security, a pastor in Nigeria, an executive officer of the U.S. Marine Corps, and a social worker from Afghanistan. Each one has a unique story and a desire to hone skills to mobilize positive change.

I struggle to describe the intensity of the essays. Despite challenging circumstances, voices of hope and passion—and dedication to peace—prevailed.

My experience confirmed the tremendous impact that Rotary’s Peace Fellowship program has around the world. Endorsed by Rotary Districts, 117 fellowships were awarded from 63 countries for the next academic year. As Peace Centre graduates, those voices will be agents of peace striving to create conditions in their workplace and communities to address underlying causes of conflict, including poverty and lack of education.



Rotary has a strong commitment to lead the world in peacebuilding. Our partnership with the Institute of Economics and Peace provides analytical data used to evoke action to support the positive pillars of peace necessary for a sustainable thriving environment. We offer many paths to become involved with peacebuilding. Fergal McCarthy, Rotary Peace Programs Manager, assures strategic synergy among our myriad peace activities and programs. Currently, 23 Global Peacebuilder Districts support the Peace Centers and the Peace and Conflict Prevention Area of Focus with contributions of USD\$25,000. This support is vital.

With Rotary’s Peace Centers expanding, peace education is gaining momentum. A newly released [*Positive Peace in Action Guide*](#), copywritten by Summer Lewis, Rotary-IEP Partnership Coordinator, is an exceptionally comprehensive guide to help clubs design and implement events to promote positive peace and strengthen communities.

[*Top Ten Ways You Can Be an Everyday Peacebuilder*](#) is another excellent resource, with links to stories, videos, the Positive Peace Academy, Peace Fellow Alumni Speakers, Positive Peace Activators, Rotary Action Groups, and peacebuilding partner organizations.

Across our Zones, Rotarians selected for the Donald MacRae Peace Award are acknowledged and celebrated. Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, a World Heritage Site and the world’s

first International Peace Park, spans the border between the province of Alberta and the state of Montana. Another symbol of peaceful relationships is the International Peace Garden on the border of Manitoba and North Dakota. District Peacebuilder committees lead activities to celebrate Peace Days, peace programs, launch new initiatives such as Positive Peace Clubs and support The Rotary Foundation.

In each case, one voice raised an issue. Many voices actualized change. How important is peace to you? How will your voice make peace a reality?