

## **WORKING FOR PEACE**

**Now that peace seems further away than ever, with wars close to home and further away, its importance is once again emphasized. It is therefore great news that a seventh Rotary Peace Center will be officially opened at BAU Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul in February 2024. We talk about it with Lies van Wijngaarden, Peace Major Gifts Initiative Adviser 2023-2026.**

The seventh Peace Center, which will be operational from the 2025-2026 academic year, will be added to the list of centers already available worldwide. Lies: 'These are Duke University in North Carolina, University of Queensland in Brisbane, Makerere University in Uganda, International Christian University in Tokyo and closer to home Uppsala University in Sweden and University of Bradford in England. At these universities, selected students follow a certificate or master's degree program via a Rotary Scholarship. Typically, these people already have experience in peace negotiations or have already done targeted fieldwork related to peace. They are therefore usually not very young people, because they have at least 3-6 years of work experience.'

### **Selection procedure**

The selection procedure for a scholarship is strict. 'The selection procedure opens on February 1, 24 for the 2024-2025 academic year and the participants must be known no later than May 15. There is great enthusiasm, around 800 students register every year, but there are only 90 places worldwide. This ensures that we can be strict and select our students carefully. By choosing the best students, the chance of success is high. We see that most of them graduate with honors. An important requirement is that they return to their country of origin after training to use their knowledge there. And that does happen. Once they graduate, they commit themselves to peace from various perspectives.'

### **1700 graduates**

A good example of this is Ana Prada from Colombia, according to Lies. 'She studied Peace Economics at Uni Queensland and specialized in food sovereignty: who has the power to produce and distribute food? Does that power lie with the state or with the people? This study ensures that she can continue to work on this as a Rotary Peace Fellow in her own country. That is why it is also important that our students already have experience in the field. This way they can continue lobbying in their existing network. Approximately 24% of our graduates end up working for NGOs in their own country, such as the Red Cross, or serving in governments or other organizations, such as the United Nations, where they can be of significance. We are already approaching 1,700 graduates, so their influence is increasing. It is also nice to see that all these alumni know how to find each other. At Uni Queensland, the Rotary Peace Center has been around for 20 years and the students naturally have contact with each other. That ensures a large support base and more decisiveness.'

### **Peace fellow**

A student not only has to pass the selection process, but also needs guidance during the studies. 'Both from a mentor at a Rotary club near the university, and from someone from a district, who guides the student through the entire process from application to placement. That district does not necessarily have to be the district where the student comes from. In the Netherlands, Sofie van London is District Rotary Peace Fellowship Subcommittee Chair for D1570. She is currently guiding Ornella from France, who is studying in Sweden. She was asked to do this by the Rotary Foundation, because this position is not filled in the district where Ornella comes from. But unfortunately Sofie is currently the only one in the Netherlands who holds this position. That is why I would like to call on all districts to create such a Subcommittee Chair. It would be fantastic if we could fulfill this function in every district in the Netherlands and take it to a higher level, so that, just like the IHE Water Platform, there will soon also be a Peace Platform. Anyone who wants to know more about this position can of course contact me (peace.mgi.lies@gmail.com), and also Sofie.'

**Positive Peace**

A nice exercise in conflict resolution is the methodology of Charlie Allen, director of IEP, the Institute for Economics and Peace, says Lies. 'His Positive Peace methodology simply shows, through 8 interconnected circles, where the problem lies. How do you deal with your neighbors? And are the rights of others respected? Are there conflicts or is there corruption? With this methodology you immediately see what Positive Peace means, but you also immediately see what happens if one link is missed. I often use this methodology when I come to clubs to tell more about my work for Rotary in the field of peace.'

**Activities**

As a Peace Major Gifts Initiative Adviser, Lies is very busy. 'My job is not only to draw attention to world peace in 'my' zone of the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland and to work together with the nine other people worldwide in this position. It is also about making an effort to raise 75 million in direct donations or commitments for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, with a focus on the Rotary Peace Centers. The fact that we can open our seventh Peace Center in Istanbul is partly thanks to a pledge of 15.5 million from the Otto & Fran Walter Foundation from America, but we would also very much like to realize a Rotary Peace Center in South America. And of course we want more scholars worldwide to study at our Rotary Peace Centers.'

To create awareness, Lies regularly attends meetings to talk about her work. 'On the one hand, to raise awareness of the Rotary Peace Centers as much as possible and, on the other hand, to make known the opportunities that members, clubs and districts have to contribute to this - financially or in the form of a District Rotary Peace Fellowship Subcommittee Chair. Let's create the next generation of Leaders in Peace Building and Development!', she concludes her passionate speech.