

## **\$15.5 million gift will fund new Rotary Peace Center in Middle East or North Africa**

The Otto and Fran Walter Foundation has pledged \$15.5 million to The Rotary Foundation to start a [Rotary Peace Center](#) in the Middle East or North Africa.

The new center will offer a [professional development certificate program](#) focused on peacebuilding and development issues in the region. This generous gift from the [Walter Foundation](#), which is based in Boothbay Harbor, Maine, USA, will fund the center's startup costs and operating expenses, as well as an endowment that will provide peace fellowships in perpetuity for up to 40 students to study there each year.

“Rotary has, for a long time, looked at how we can make a tangible contribution to the one area of the world where the element of peace has seemed so elusive,” says Rotary Foundation Trustee Chair K.R. Ravindran. “Now that opportunity has come our way, thanks to the immense generosity of the Otto and Fran Walter Foundation. We will take full advantage to create a center where we can inspire our peace fellows to give flight to their spirit and equip them to be able to support action that will bring about peace and goodwill in a troubled region.”

The Rotary Foundation will select a partner institution to host the Otto and Fran Walter Rotary Peace Center in 2024, and the first Rotary Peace Fellows are expected to start studying there in January 2026.

Otto and Fran Walter established their family foundation to promote peace and other charitable causes, and their mission lives on even after their deaths. Otto was born in Germany in 1907 and worked as a lawyer there. When totalitarianism arose in Europe, the Nazi government enacted the Nuremberg laws, which pushed Jewish professionals out of their jobs. Summarily disbarred, Otto worked briefly as a law clerk before emigrating to the United States in 1936. He and his parents settled in New York.

His law degree wasn't recognized in the U.S., so Otto improved his English and started professional training. He earned a license as a certified public accountant and opened an accounting firm. But he never stopped believing that he could work as a lawyer again. Eventually, he sold his accounting firm and entered law school at New York Law School, graduating in 1954. The next year, he started a law firm which, with the support of his wife, Fran, steadily grew to employ 40 lawyers.

Through his legal work, Otto helped promote peace and improve relations between Germany and the U.S. After the Nuremberg laws were repealed, he became licensed to practice law in Germany and served as an adviser to the German Ministry of Finance during the negotiations of a 1954 U.S.-German income tax treaty. Otto and Fran focused on their philanthropic foundation later in their lives, becoming personally involved in the grants that they were able to fund. Otto became a member of the Rotary Club of New York City.

[Read more about Otto Walter and his accomplishments.](#)

After Otto and Fran both died in 2003, Rotarian Frank Helman, a law colleague and friend, became president and director of their Foundation. He and his wife, Martha “Marty” Helman, the current president of the foundation, helped shepherd the \$15.5 million gift to The Rotary Foundation. The Helmans are both members of the Rotary Club of Boothbay Harbor.

“The Walter Foundation can imagine no better way to remember Otto and Fran and their legacy than through a Rotary Peace Center in the Middle East — a part of the world that has been torn by conflict,” says Marty, who also serves as chair of The Rotary Foundation’s Peace Major Gifts Initiative Committee. “The Walter Foundation is a small family foundation; we needed the partnership with Rotary to create a world-class peace center.”

Since the first Rotary Peace Fellows began their studies in 2002, the Rotary Peace Centers have trained more than 1,400 fellows who now work in more than 115 countries. Many serve as leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations, the military, education, law enforcement, and international organizations like the [United Nations](#) and [World Bank](#).