

# ROTARY DISTRICT SUPPORTS WOMEN PEACE BUILDERS IN WEST AFRICA

By May Yoneyama O'Brien, D7620 DISC Co-chair

Rotary District 7620 is a major supporter of the Women Peace Builders Training in West Africa, a global grant that was recently approved by The Rotary Foundation. This proposal is designed to



support and prepare women primarily in West Africa (from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cameroon) to thrive as leaders in peacebuilding. This is a multi-country, cooperative effort led by Jim Palmquist of the Rotary Club of Emmaus, PA; the Ikeja Rotary Club of Lagos, Nigeria; and Mediators Beyond

Borders International (MBBI), an international Service Partner of Rotary International, which was founded on the principle of people-centered peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is a pillar of Rotary International's Mission.

How did the Peace Builders Global Grant come to D7620? When DC Rotarian Marcus Soriano attended the Toronto Convention in 2018, he connected with this Women Peace Builders project showcased in the House of Friendship exhibit hall and brought it home. Then fellow Rotarian John Sullivan, head of the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and part of the National Endowment for Democracy, evaluated the project for the DC's International Service Committee, and gave it a strong "thumbs up" commenting, "This training is much needed." The DC Club donated \$5k, and D7620 donated \$10k in DDF, which was matched 100% by The Rotary Foundation. Meanwhile grant leader Jim Palmquist spent the following two years

speaking to clubs, calling 1500 leads to secure the rest of the funding, and then COVID-19 hit and the grant had to be re-imagined.

Vision for Peace. Jim Palmquist gave a shoutout to us and reported on this peace project during the recent MBBI breakout at the Zone 33/34 Leadership Summit on November 21:

"While most Rotary projects impact Peace, not many districts are familiar with peacebuilding and very few projects deal directly with Peace. Rotary has a phenomenal opportunity to change the world, much like we've done with Polio but even broader in its impact because we are so well-positioned to be the peacebuilders of the world. And with resources like MBBI...we have just tremendous potential. . . . I do think this is just such a powerful idea, the idea of training people on how to reduce conflict and engage as junior mediators in their communities, that we could really change Rotary's focus in the world to be the NGO peacebuilder in the world."

What's it all about? The goal is to develop and support women leaders working to address conflicts in their communities and countries. This month, 30 scholarship candidates, five from each country, will be screened and interviewed from among 250 applicants. "There is an incredible thirst for peacebuilding skills," said Jim. The first stage of the training will start in January 2021. Candidates will include a diverse group, different ages, rural and urban mix, potentially recognized leaders in their communities, all with the potential and commitment to share their skills and put their training into practice. For example, one graduate trained 9,000 people, facilitating the peace process in her country through MBBI training.

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