

## **Giving peace a chance: Students from Arab and Muslim Majority Nations Awarded Rotary World Peace Fellowships**

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(Beirut, April 2, 2009) – Amid daily headlines of war, ethnic and sectarian violence emerges some welcome positive news: Rotary International – a humanitarian service organization dedicated to world peace and understanding - has awarded six students from Arab and Muslim majority countries the opportunity to study peacemaking and conflict resolution at the Rotary Centers for International Studies located at leading international universities.

“You have to only pick up a newspaper to realize how vitally important it is that our future leaders be skilled in the arts of conflict resolution and peace negotiation. These students will shape the future of peace in conflict zones around the globe,” said Rotary International President and Korean businessman Dong Kurn Lee while attending a Rotary conference in Cairo on February 6.

Launched in 2002, the two-year, master’s level Rotary Peace Centers program aims to help the next generation of government officials, diplomats and humanitarian leaders develop the skills needed to reduce the threat of war and violence worldwide.

“Rotary is a non-political, non-religious volunteer organization where all cultures, religions, traditions, are respected and merged to respond to humanitarian needs. It is our hope that these impressive Rotary peace fellows will go out into the world and make a real difference in their home regions,” says Dr. Michel P. Jazzar, Rotary representative to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in Beirut. He is a member of the Rotary Centers Selection Committee and member of Rotary club of Kesrouan.

The sixty students in the 2009-11 class were chosen through a globally competitive selection process based on their professional and academic achievement. Like the members of the classes preceding them, the fellows are a diverse group, representing 33 countries and an array of professional and cultural backgrounds. Their interests and areas of expertise include education, international law, economic development, journalism, and social justice. The six students from the Arab and Muslim

majority nations hail from Palestine, Sudan, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Indonesia. They are:

Nisreen Abdallah, West Bank, Palestine, age 26, is program director for youth leadership development for OneVoice Movement, which promotes a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and trains and empowers Palestinian youth in the field of conflict resolution. A native of Palestine, she knows first-hand the intense political and social ramifications of living in a country plagued by conflict. Abdallah will attend the Rotary Center at the University of Bradford, England.

Abu Sifian Taj Elassfia, Nyala, Sudan, age 28, has worked with International Non-Government Organizations in Darfur to help generate income for people living in camps for internally displaced people (IDP). As founder of Youth Without Borders, he assists youth by making a link between war refugees and host communities in southern Sudan. He will attend the Rotary Center at Duke University and the University of North Carolina, USA.

Humari Shafi Awan, Abbottabad, Pakistan, age 34, established the Al-Ansar Society which helps poor families improve their income and send their children to school. The society also raises funds to provide schooling for underprivileged children and training for teachers. She will attend the Rotary Center at the University of Queensland, Australia.

Sanaz Shahrokni, of Dezfool, Iran, age 28, currently lives in Geneva, where she has worked for the World Organization for Peace. As coordinator for the Peace Universities project, she was instrumental in developing a database for peace education. She also helped organize Double Match for Peace, a football match featuring celebrity players from different countries embattled in conflict. Having grown up in Iran, she saw the devastation of war during the Iran-Iraq war. Dezfool, who studied French literature at the University of Shahid Beheshti in Teheran teaches Persian and organizes cultural tours to Iran. She will attend the Rotary Center at the University of Queensland, Australia.

Gozel, Arazmedova, of Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, age 29, has fought to end the trafficking of women in her current position as Visa Assistant at the U.S. Embassy in Turkmenistan. After earning an undergraduate degree in English language studies from the Magtymguly Turkmen State University, Arazmedova worked for the American Red Cross in Turkmenistan where she was responsible for food aid distribution to about 10,000 tuberculosis patients and their families. She will attend the Rotary Center at the University of Bradford, England.

Indri Hapsari Mustika Dewi, of Jakarta, Indonesia, age 30, was a member of an earthquake emergency response team which helped children and senior citizen earthquake victims in Bantul, Yogyakarta. She also worked as a teacher developing outreach programs for street children in Cijantung, Jakarta who could not only afford to go to school, but also suffered from domestic violence and exploitation. She will attend the Rotary Center at the International Christian University, Japan.

More than 360 Rotary Center alumni already are making a difference in key decision-making positions in governments and organizations around the world. "It is this growing network of peacemakers that makes us believe that peace is possible," says Rotary International President Lee.

Shakeel Ahmed, a Pakistani alumnus of the 2003-05 class of the Rotary Center at Duke University, is now a faculty member at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and actively involved in peace-building activities. Attending a Peace Symposium in Riyadh in 2008, Ahmed received a royal invitation by King Abdulla of Saudia Arabia who was impressed with his expertise in the Middle East conflict.

Mahamoud Abdi Sheikh Ahmed of Borama, Somalia, who currently attends the Rotary Center at the University of Bradford, England. He was a team leader with the Norwegian Refugee Council in Somaliland, which provides basic education to children of displaced families. Ahmed's own childhood was interrupted by inter-clan violence, forcing his family to flee to Ethiopia. Ahmed eventually returned to Borama, became a teacher and manager and newscaster of a local TV station.

"Twenty years of civil war have torn Somalia apart and all Somalis have become victims. I believe the conflict resolution and peace building skills I will learn at Bradford will help me contribute to the future prospects of my country," Ahmed says.

The Rotary Centers are located at leading universities in England, Japan, Australia, Argentina, and the United States. In addition to the two-year program, the Rotary Center at the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok offers an intensive, three-month course aimed at mid-level professionals in governments, NGOs, and international industry. Launched in 2006, 14 citizens from Muslim majority countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Turkey, have completed the peace

studies program in Thailand.

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Rotary – an organization of business and professional leaders united worldwide in humanitarian service - is the world's largest privately-funded source of international scholarships. Rotary has more than 1.2 million members in more than 33,000 clubs in over 200 countries and geographic regions. In the Arab world (Middle East and Maghreb region), there are more than 200 Rotary clubs with nearly 6,000 members which address a wide range of issues including poverty, health care, environmental programs and vocational training. For more information visit [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org) or [www.rotary2450.org](http://www.rotary2450.org)

Rotary International  
1560 Sherman Avenue  
Evanston, IL 60201, USA  
Press Contact:  
Kiki Melonides  
Media Relations  
[kiki.melonides@rotary.org](mailto:kiki.melonides@rotary.org)  
+1 (847) 866-3134

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