Rotary & International Day of Peace

Honorable President of the Senate
Honorable Ministers
Your Excellence Ambassadors
Dear Presidents of various Rotary Clubs
Fellow Rotarians and Rotaracts
Brothers and Sisters,
Ladies & Gentlemen;

On behalf of my fellow Rotarians here in Rwanda and in the world, I extend our warmest greetings and wish you Peace in every way possible. Peace, Peace, Peace!

It is a privilege and an honor to stand before you today to speak about World Peace Day and The Rotary Foundation. Rotary plays an important role in the World peace.

My name is Floriane Brown. I live in the state of Minnesota in the United States of America. I have been living in the US for the last 25 years. However, I have been making frequent trips to Rwanda in the last 4 years. Although I have been living in the US for so many years, I am proud to call myself a Rwandan woman. I am also a devoted wife and a mother of several children, two of whom I carried in my own womb, a devoted Christian, a sister, an auntie to so many, a friend, an encourager, a counseling psychologist by training and above all, an ambassador of love. My life’s goal or calling is to make a difference in someone else’s life especially orphans, vulnerable children and widows. I have also been a Rotarian since 2006 and currently serve as Vice President of my Rotary Club; the Minneapolis University Rotary Club. However, tonight, we are not here to talk about me. We are here to celebrate the “World Peace Day”.

Each year, events take place all around the world for the International Day of Peace. Every Peace Day event provides an opportunity to inspire individuals and empower communities to celebrate victories for peace that have been won throughout the year, and to rededicate our commitment to work for a more peaceful, just and sustainable world all year long. International Day of Peace is about creating a culture of peace for future generations. Anyone anywhere can celebrate Peace Day. It can be as simple as lighting a candle at noon, or just sitting in silent meditation. Or it can involve getting your co-workers, organization, community or government engaged in a large event. The impact would be immense if millions of people in all parts of the world were coming together for one day of peace. International Day of Peace is also a Day of Ceasefire – personal or political. I invite you to take this opportunity to make peace in your own relationships as well as impact the larger conflicts of our time. Just imagine what a whole Day of Ceasefire would mean to humankind.
Today, I am thrilled to be in a country that is known as the most peaceful country in Africa. Whenever I plan a trip to Rwanda, I still run into Americans who believe it is unsafe to travel to this country because of what took place in 1994. It is always my greatest pleasure to tell them that I have never felt so safe in my life as much as I do when I am in Rwanda. Therefore, I seize that opportunity to educate them about our beautiful country; its gorgeous people and its outstanding accomplishments since the 1994 genocide. Many of them cannot comprehend how a country that has suffered so much in human loss, spiritual and psychological breakdown could be peaceful today. Inviting these people to our beautiful country is my duty. Let’s put our hands together for the excellent job the Rwandan government has done to get this country to where it is today. It is worthy of praise; isn’t it?

Education is a necessary part of the peace-building movement. Only by spreading the idea of a culture of peace can we hope to create lasting change. It starts as early as preschool and kindergarten, where small children can learn about peace through art projects and role plays. International Day of Peace can be observed by anyone, anywhere. Simply by meditating on peace or participating in the minute of silence at noon, you are part of the Peace Day movement. Peace Day is also a good opportunity to reach out to other spiritual traditions and come together for a day of interfaith. Many spiritual traditions are deeply involved in peace-building work and already observe International Day of Peace in their community. By focusing the service of the day on peace, or encouraging members to observe Peace Day, spiritual organizations can help spread the message. Individuals can observe the day by meditating on peace, praying for peace or participating in the minute of silence for peace.

In past years, Heads of State, Governors and Mayors have declared Proclamations of Peace for the International Day of Peace, urging their citizens to observe and celebrate Peace Day. City Councils and State Legislatures have declared Peace Day Resolutions too. In many cases, past Peace Day Proclamations and Resolutions were obtained by individuals, families, classes of students, and local organizations, simply by asking their leaders to issue them.

I would like to share with you a few peace Quotes from some of my heroes: "On this International Day, let us promise to make peace not just a priority, but a passion. Let us pledge to do more, wherever we are in whatever way we can, to make every day a day of peace." ~ U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon
"Peace is one of humanity’s most precious needs. It is also the United Nation’s highest calling." ~ U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

Then Mahtma Gandhi spoke about peace in these words: "Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man."

The last quote I’d like to share with you is one from Martin Luther King Jr. "Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal."
Let me now say something about Rotary and Peace Day. Rotary’s motto is “**Peace through service**”. That brings me to the goal we all share as Rotarians: Peace is possible. And think about your attendance here tonight. You are an example to the world showing that men and women of diverging views can indeed break bread together in an atmosphere of fellowship and friendship. **Yes, peace is possible.**

Rotary is a global network of community volunteers. It is one of the largest and most influential international humanitarian service organizations worldwide. Founded in Chicago on February 23, 1905, today over 1.2 million members belong to 33,000 Rotary clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas.

Rotary members, as volunteers, conduct projects to address today’s humanitarian challenges, including illiteracy, disease, hunger, poverty, lack of clean water, and environmental concerns while encouraging high standards in all vocations. Rotary members strive to build goodwill and peace, and provide humanitarian service in their communities and throughout the world. Kigali Doyen; Kigali Virunga, Mont Jari and Gasabo Rotary Clubs join Rotary clubs around the world to recognize the day, also known as Rotary’s **“World Understanding and Peace Day.”** Rotary clubs have often celebrated the day by participating in service projects.

We, at Nibakure Children’s Village, know firsthand what Rotary can do for a project like ours. Nibakure Children’s Village is a not for profit organization based in Minnesota but doing work in Nyamata in the Eastern Province, Bugesera District. The organization’s mission is to provide orphaned children of Rwanda, with the help of widows, with safe housing, a foster family, healthcare, education and career training. Our mission to the children of Rwanda is to “Let Them Grow, Give Them Hope”.

Since we started construction in May of 2009 and entered into operations in August 2011, The Rotary Foundation (TRF) has contributed $145,584 in various projects. Because of the financial support we have received from Rotary, today Nibakure village has running water and our neighbors have also benefited from this amazing support. Nibakure has also received several other donations such as a school bus, underground water storage and an above the ground water tank, plantation of an orchard, development of greenhouses and financial support for a safety gate and fence around 6 hectares of land donated by the Rwandan government. As you can tell, Nibakure is a great witness of what Rotary can do for communities at large. Without Rotary support and contributions, Nibakure will not be where it is today. To Rotary International!
In closing, I would like to invite those of you who have not considered joining Rotary to do so today. Better yet, if you are interested in social work to advance your own local community, I urge you to consult one of the clubs here in Kigali to find out how Rotary could help you accomplish your social goals. You will be happy you did check in with Rotary.

I want to emphasize that Rotary is not a cult as rumors have made people believe. It is not an anti-Christ organization. Many people who do not know anything about this great humanitarian organization believe that we, Rotarians, are against religion or Christianity. There are several members who are born again Christians, there are men and women of God who are Rotarians. There is no segregation inside Rotary. What we do as Rotarians is simply come together to serve the needy and to do good in the world. We are Rotarians belonging to an organization with a Foundation for peace, an organization that can constantly offer hope through educational and charitable projects. In this world there is a need for some to rise above the rest, to rise above the average life by giving of their best. Would you be those that dare to try when challenged by the task? To rise to heights you’ve never seen, is that too much to ask?

This is your day, great purpose to achieve.
Accept the challenge of your goals and in yourselves believe,
You will be proud of what you've done, when at the close of day,
You look back from whence you've come, and peace will come to stay.

To you, Fellow Rotarians, Thank you for the good you have done in the world,
The good you are doing in the world,
The good you will do in the world.

As John Lennon said it once:
“You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one.”

And this is what we do as Rotarians, we Make Dreams Real.

Thank you for your attention.

PEACE!