

# **ROTARY WEST AFRICAN PEACE CARAVAN**

## ***HARNESSING THE ENERGIES OF LOCAL PEOPLE TO PROMOTE PEACE, NON VIOLENCE CONFLICT RESOLUTION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND RECONCILIATION IN WEST AFRICA***

**Name of Project:** ROTARY WEST AFRICAN PEACE CARAVAN: HARNESSING THE ENERGIES OF LOCAL PEOPLE TO PROMOTE PEACE, NON VIOLENCE CONFLICT RESOLUTION, HUMAN RIGHTS AND RECONCILIATION IN WEST AFRICA

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## PROJECT SUMMARY

The initiative is designed to mobilize local people living at border areas and in major towns and villages in four west African countries to serve as agents for non violence conflict transformation, peace building, reconciliation and human rights. It is in line with the Mission of *Rotary International and the West African Youth Network* to further peace and regional understanding.

It grew from the felt need to contribute to the building of regional peace and reconciliation in West Africa. It encompasses a Peace Caravan by young people from four countries in the region as well as Rotarians and Peace Scholars in selected selected towns and communities. It will also include the construction of peace huts at the various border areas and workshops geared towards building peace constituencies amongst local people living at border areas.

## BACKGROUND

West Africa is a region composed of 15 countries. These countries are members of the Regional Economic Group, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS was created in 1975 to promote regional economic integration amongst its member states. For more than two decades, the people of the countries in the region live side by side in peace and enjoy economic prosperity.

However, in 1989, a civil war broke out in Liberia. This later degenerated into a sub-regional conflict spreading into Sierra Leone (1991), Guinea (2000) and then the Ivory Coast (2002).

With the intervention of the United Nations and the subsequent deployment of UN Peacekeepers in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast, peace returned to this troubled region. However, despite the gains made in the restoration of peace, there is still much more that is needed to be done to ensure the building of vibrant wholesome functioning societies in West Africa.

There have been some laudable initiatives by women, civil society and youth groups to infuse a new level of dynamism in the peace and reconciliation process in the region. A level of mistrust and suspicion still exists amongst countries in the region. The need to promote love and reconciliation amongst

countries in West Africa that have experience conflicts cannot be overemphasised. The conflicts in these countries were interrelated. It is therefore necessary to put into motion some new peace mechanisms that will seek to involve the people of the affected countries. These mechanisms must aim to develop a people-to-people's peace driven programme.

In this light, Richelieu Allison, a graduate of the Rotary Peace and Conflict Studies Programme at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, has decided to undertake a very innovative project that seeks to involve people at the local levels as a means of inspiring the building of a people's centred culture of peace in a region that has experienced some of West Africa's most devastating conflicts. Thus, the idea of a *Rotary West African Peace Caravan* was born.

The idea has been embraced by the *Rotary Foundation of Rotary International*, an organization of 1,200,000 members around the world that shares a vision of world peace and global understanding. Rotary International was established to foster goodwill and world peace. Over the last few decades, the organisation has formulated a number of programmes, including the training of qualified peace builders to foster its dream of world peace. The Peace Caravan will help to further accelerate the organisation's vision for peace and reconciliation.

## **PROJECT INFORMATION**

The aim of the *Rotary West African Peace Caravan* will be to promote peace, love, unity and reconciliation in the war affected countries in West Africa and to contribute to the United Nations Decade for a Culture of Peace. The peace caravan will increase the involvement of local people in peace building in the region.

### **Goals**

1. To contribute to the building of a culture of peace and non violence conflict resolution in the West African region.
2. To promote peaceful coexistence and reconciliation amongst countries in West Africa
3. To promote human rights and good will.

4. To further the mission of Rotary International to promote world peace and regional understanding.
5. To engage people in the rural areas in initiatives that seek to harness their energies to promote peace.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Organise a 21 day ***Rotary Peace Caravan***. The caravan will be undertaken by selected Rotarians from the affected countries, leaders from Rotary International, Rotary Peace Fellows and youth leaders from the countries involved. . The peace caravan specifically targets some border-villages, as these border areas have often been at the heart of the conflict. The Governments of Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast will be contacted to fully participate in the initiative.
2. Conduct Sensitization workshop at the various border areas and selected towns and communities during the caravan. Eight workshops will be held at the border areas and about 12 will be held in selected towns and villages during the caravan. These workshops will seek to provide innovative training in non violent conflict resolution, peace building, human rights and leadership.
3. Distribute sensitization leaflets and also organize traditional dance throughout the campaign to ensure that that the message get across. cconduct 8 peace vigils at the border points and talk to community leaders.
4. Collect signatures for a ***West African Rotary Peace Manifesto*** which will be presented later to the Heads of States of participating countries.
5. Undertake the construction of ***Rotary Peace Huts*** at the various border areas. Seven huts will be dedicated during the caravan and will be used by the local people at the border areas to settle disputes amongst them.

## 6. Organize Peace brigades at the various border areas involving the local people

### RATIONALE

Local people can play an important and special role when it comes to promoting peace in the region and motivating communities and fellow youth to support and work for peace. In the conflict-torn region of West Africa, efforts have been made to support peace-building initiatives, paying attention to the role of women and civil society in peace building. No comparable efforts were made to invest and promote the role of local people, including traditional leaders, youth leaders, who not only represent an enormous potential for change in post-conflict situations, but often also are the key actors in the community development and social transformation among their peers.

Using a multi track approach, people living at border communities and in rural villages will be utilized as important catalysts for peace by strengthening fragile relationships and building trust. Stronger relationships will bolster productive meetings and sustain peaceful affairs.

### TARGET

In border villages local people from both sides will be brought together. They will be reached via community leaders and local NGOs. Special attention will go to activities that engage the youth and elders. In every town 500 people will be reached who can later spread the message. During the journey about 15,000 people will be talked to and given the message of peace.

The participants on the caravan will include representatives from Rotary International, local Rotarians, Rotary Peace Scholars, and youth volunteers from the four countries, Regional Organizations, Civil Society and other key stakeholders. The selected countries include Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast.

### MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

The project will be managed by the West African Youth Network. The Regional Programme Director of WAYN is Richelieu Allison a graduate of the first class of the Rotary Peace and Conflict Studies Programme at Chulalongkorn University. WAYN shall work with Rotary International and maintain contacts with local Rotary clubs in the region, Governments, regional grouping as well as donors and shall further be responsible for keeping accurate record of all activities undertaken during the project to ensure that it achieves its intended impact. The Peace committees that will be formulated during the caravan shall be coordinated by WAYN as part of its Peace Building Initiative to ensure sustainability.

The West African Youth Network (WAYN) was established in March 2001 by four young people from across the region to serve as a prime catalyst to promote youth participation in issues affecting their protection, survival and development. Against the backdrop of the increase in the number of civilian conflicts in West Africa, WAYN grew from the felt need to mobilize young people to get them off the fence and on to the playing pitch as important agents for social change.

From a modest beginning, the organization has now extended its activities and has membership in twelve West African Countries. Since its establishment, WAYN has been working to promote the visibility of young people in governance and public policy formulation. Since 2001, WAYN has galvanized the efforts of young people across West Africa

WAYN is a non-political and non religious organization based in Sierra Leone with activities in 12 West African countries.

### **Anticipated results**

- Increased involvement of youth and local people in peace building in their area
- More awareness among local people concerning peace and reconciliation in their region
- Establishment of 8 *Rotary Peace Brigades* at various border points amongst local people

- Collection of more than 20,000 signature to form the basis of a ***Rotary West African Peace Manifesto*** and presented to the various governments and stakeholders
- Construction of 7 ***Rotary Peace Huts*** at various border areas to serve as units for non violence conflict resolution
- Increased acknowledge of the activities of Rotary
- Communities in the region adopt the Rotary Peace Community Initiative
- Building of a culture of peace in a region that was once torn apart by conflict
- Holding of more than 2 peace building workshops across the four countries