

## **Youla Pompilus-Touré**

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2008-2010 Bradford University Rotary World Peace Fellows



# FIRST REPORT

November 2008

## Academic activities and progress

16 September was the day of enrollment at the University and my first chance to meet most of the other Rotary World Peace Fellows. We had corresponded through email for months so it felt like we already knew everyone, but nothing compared to the moments when we actually interacted with each other for the first time.

*Left to right. BACK: Altaf Abid (India), Xiao Mei Liu (China), Julia Smith (Canada), me, Yvette Selim (Australia), Satoko Hara (Japan), Murtala Touray (Gambia). FRONT: Mahamoud Sh. Ahmed (Somalia), Yuka Nagatani (Japan), Vanessa Contopulos (USA), Francis Kabosha (Zambia).*



## Classes/Modules

Each semester, Masters' students register for 3 modules. As a student in the Conflict Resolution Masters program, only one was optional for me. The number of interesting subjects offered made my choice difficult to make. After attending the first lecture of most modules, and struggling over the decision, I settled on a class called *Participation: Theory and Values* taught by Dr. Graeme Chesters. Its aim is to look at citizen participation in government, social movements, and civil society and analyse factors that improve or impede this participation. The small number of students registered in the class has allowed for greater flexibility in the work and has offered Graeme the opportunity to put in practice his commitment to differentiated instruction – the idea of adapting one's teaching style to students' learning style.

The other two modules I am registered for are: *Introduction to Peace Studies*, which outlines the history and evolution of the field of peace studies; and *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice 1*, which seeks to have students develop an understanding of the core concepts processes and theories that define the field of conflict resolution.

### First Assignment

The process of study at Bradford is very much self-directed, which practically means that students can focus class work on their specific area of interest. My work experience with Quakers turned me onto non-violence as a tool for social change, so in my first essay I looked at the links between non-violence and conflict resolution and concentrated on Quakerism as the theological basis for the contributions offered by members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

## **Involvement with Rotarians in the area**

In early August, upon my return from my travels, I planned a little detour through Bradford. I wanted a chance to see the city I would be moving to, and have a head start in the search for a place to live. When I arrived in Bradford for the first time on August 7<sup>th</sup>, Phil Jackson, my host counsellor, met me at bus station in the middle of his workday. It was nice to be greeted by a friendly face and to be taken on a tour of the city. Once I was back in Bradford and fully settled, Phil invited me to attend meeting of his club. I was immediately impressed by the gender diversity of the club, their good energy and the sense of fellowship that is so apparent between the members. I am looking forward to speaking to them and getting involved in some of their activities.

In terms of Rotary activities in the district and throughout England, there has been a steady flow since our arrival in Bradford. These events have provided me a chance to see new parts of England and meet Rotarians from all over the United Kingdom.

From 26-28 September, Rotary World Peace Fellows attended the Birmingham Link Conference. We headed for Birmingham in a minivan, our first excursion as a group through the English countryside. The idea of hiring a private car was not only practical, it was perfect timing. Although as Fellows, we had seen each other in class and in other social activities, spending hours on a bus got us to open up and bond. We sang, talked about our homes and became friends. Looking back on our time together, I can see that this is where we became a unit, we became Class VII.

The District 1040 conference that took place in Scarborough 10-12 October was our first opportunity as Peace Fellows talk about our work and ourselves. Ian Park, the host Area Peace Fellows Officer, helped us develop a presentation to introduce our class, our work and the program to the Rotarians attending. From the feedback we received afterwards, it seems that attendees enjoyed it.

The Bill Huntley Peace Seminar hosted at the University of Bradford, was another chance for our class to talk about our commitment to peace. In this presentation, I spoke of the challenges of immigration and my family's influence in shaping my commitment to social justice and peace.

## **Impressions of the program**

My impressions of the program so far are excellent. The academic program at Bradford is well developed. We are learning from people who are leaders in their field. There are even times when classes have to be cancelled because our professors get called into international negotiations!

In addition to the academic program, it must be recognised that one of the strengths of the Peace Department is the diversity of the student body. My fellow classmates come from all continents, worship in all traditions, and have rich and varied backgrounds. Two months into the program, I am still meeting new people whose life and work experience impresses me. The multicultural nature of the student body combined with the diversity of work experiences make for stimulating class discussions. I must admit to have been pleased this year to see Canada well represented in the student population. With at least six of us keen to share some traditions, we were able to organise a Canadian Thanksgiving celebration at my house and invite the entire Masters class.

*Vanessa (a Peace Fellow from the USA) and Jose Zepeda (a classmate and Rotarian from Guatemala) serenading us with Spanish ballads on a Canadian holiday celebrated in the UK!*



I also cannot forget to talk about the RWPF Host Area Committee. David Pollard, Ian Park, Dick Hazlehurst, Chris Brown, Wally Hisrt and their partners have made us feel welcomed and excited about these opportunities. Their commitment to the promotion of the Peace Fellow program in the United Kingdom is admirable. I look forward to our continuing relationship.

## **Successes and challenges as a Rotary World Peace Fellow**

### Academic support

Since Rotary World Peace Fellows have commitments and deadlines that differ from others in the program, we are placed in the same academic tutorial group with Professor Tom

Woodhouse, the Academic Director for the Bradford Rotary Centre. He has been supportive, encouraging, accommodating, and is without a doubt one of the best aspects of our life as Bradford Fellows. Tom understands the academic demands placed on us and can offer guidance with work, and he is also completely aware of our Rotary commitments and has been forthcoming with help in order to balance the two. This last dimension is one we have come to appreciate. Whenever Peace Fellows have feared that Rotary commitments might get in the way of academic obligations, Tom has been willing to help us look at solutions. Although at times it has seemed that there has been more willingness of the part of the University to show flexibility, the balance between our class and Rotary is still one that is being defined. Looking at what we have been able to achieve, I am already confident that Peace Fellows, the University and the Host Area Committee are developing a fruitful relationship.

#### Local Rotary Support

I have appreciated the idea of matching Fellows with local Rotarians. It has allowed each Fellow to be more connected to local reality. The process of moving to a new country can be daunting so it is helpful to be in contact with people who know the city, the area and can offer help if needed. Phillip Jackson and his wife Anne have been simply fantastic. We can talk about immigration, travel, popular culture, it does not matter, I always have a great time with them.

And on this note, I would like to also thank Rotarians from home for selecting me for this opportunity, Rotarians in the UK for welcoming me, and all those who have given and are involved in making the Rotary World Peace Fellowship program possible. Thank you.