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In a country as young and ambitious as India, the true demographic dividend will come not from degrees, but from employable skills. That is where The Rotary Foundation can play a transformative role.

India adds nearly 12 million youth to its workforce annually, yet industry repeatedly flags a severe skill mismatch. Through District and Global Grants, Rotary can design hyper-local vocational programs aligned with real market demand — agro-processing in rural belts, healthcare technicians in growing urban clusters, digital services in tier-2 cities. Training must lead to jobs, not just certificates.

Rotary's greatest strength is its network of business leaders. Foundation-backed projects can integrate apprenticeships, industry co-certification and placement tracking, ensuring measurable employability. Women-focused skilling — from digital literacy to micro-enterprise development — must also be prioritised, unlocking economic participation and long-term social impact.

Equally critical is accountability. Projects should measure income enhancement, job retention and enterprise sustainability, not merely the number trained.

India does not need symbolic skill centres. It needs scalable, community-rooted vocational ecosystems. With credibility, transparent funding and grassroots leadership, The Rotary Foundation can convert vocational service from charity into sustainable capacity-building — and help India turn potential into productivity.

The opportunity is not theoretical. It is urgent. And it is entirely within Rotary's reach.

Subhojit Roy

Trustee Chair's Message - January 2026



When we think of global projects at Rotary, we often think of the cooperation between two clubs or districts that goes into Rotary Foundation global grants. These efforts form the backbone of our international grant activities. Yet we have also seen how larger projects can have even greater impact by attracting significant partners and long-term funding. These initiatives are measurable and visible, attracting yet more partners and new Rotary members who see the work in action.

Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria, one of the Foundation's Programs of Scale, embodies this vision. I asked Dolapo Lufadeju, a Rotarian from Nigeria and co-founder of the Rotary Action Group for Reproductive, Maternal, and Child Health, to share why this model has been so successful:

Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria, which began in 2022, aims to reduce maternal and neonatal deaths by 25 percent. We focus on training doctors, midwives, nurses, and community health extension workers in emergency obstetrics, neonatal care, respectful maternity practices, and long-acting reversible contraceptives.

The most vital aspect is community engagement. We conduct dialogues with traditional, religious, and youth leaders. We are organizing joint medical outreach and home visitations. State ministries of health are increasingly adopting these approaches as part of their primary health care interventions, using the template and methodologies Rotary developed.

Our electronic data-tracking system allows better monitoring of maternal and child deaths. Notably, our community-based system now tracks maternal deaths during home deliveries, something previously unmeasured.

Most significantly, maternal deaths dropped by 20 percent and neonatal deaths decreased by 28 percent in supported facilities, while postnatal clinic attendance increased by 10 percent.

I am also a member of the action group and have followed this project for over 20 years, long before it was awarded a Programs of Scale grant. In November I observed the dedicated work there of the teams with midwives and health workers.

This evolution shows what's possible when Rotary dedication meets strategic partnerships. The program's success prompted Nigerian philanthropist Sir Emeka Offor to contribute \$5 million, allowing the initiative to expand. Other countries are interested in this model.

Every contribution you make to The Rotary Foundation strengthens its power as a global force for change that channels your generosity into lasting transformation.

Holger Knaack

Trustee Chair 2025-26

Rotary's alumni honoree works to transform mindsets in peacebuilding efforts

By Amy Hoak



Image credit
Monika Lozinska

As a child during Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war, Pushpi Weerakoon planned to become a lawyer. "I was born into a civil conflict, walked minutes away from bomb blasts, and saw parents of my schoolmates killed," Weerakoon said. "From a very early stage, I understood the cost of conflict, and I knew I had to do something about it."

In 1999, with Sri Lanka a member of the British Commonwealth, Weerakoon headed to the University of Buckingham in the UK. There she earned a bachelor of law and a postgraduate diploma in international and commercial law.

Weerakoon fully intended to continue traveling down the barrister's path, but nature intervened. She was visiting Sri Lanka from England when, on 26 December 2004, an earthquake erupted beneath the Indian Ocean off the northwest coast of Sumatra, an Indonesian island. The most powerful earthquake ever recorded in Asia and one of the deadliest natural disasters in history, it spawned a monumental tsunami that hit Sri Lanka and more than a dozen other countries and left more than 220,000 people dead.

Moved by the devastation, she began volunteering with groups to help survivors. The director of the country's Alternative Dispute Resolution Institute asked her to train grassroots leaders in mediation, drawing on her law education. "After the tsunami," Weerakoon explained, "so many small claims clogged up the main court system." It was hoped that those newly trained leaders could help resolve contentious issues in Sri Lanka's well-established community-based mediation boards.

She traveled throughout the country holding mediation workshops for three weeks of every month for two years. Because

the country was approaching the final stages of the civil war, she was accompanied by members of the military into high security zones.

What followed were years of additional study and an impressive aggregation of degrees on her way to becoming an internationally respected peacebuilder, supported by Rotary at multiple steps along the way. She received an MBA from the University of Wales, a master's in conflict transformation at Eastern Mennonite University (with the help of a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship), a master's in public administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and a PhD in peace and conflict studies at the University for Peace.

Pushpi Weerakoon

Rotary Peace Fellowship, 2007

Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship, 2009

Rotary Alumni Global Service Award, 2024-25

She also studied at the **Rotary Peace Center at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok**, earning a diploma in peace studies and conflict resolution. "Chula was very hands-on," said Weerakoon, clearly impressed with the peace center program. "It's not this theory and that theory. It was very practical: If it's a class on mediation, you sit down and actually mediate."

There were also trips in the field where peace fellows interacted with Indigenous people whose lives and livelihoods were threatened by plans for a hydroelectric dam. "What Rotary exposed me to was like gold," she said. "The experience to see it, and then now having to actually do it."

Impressive as they are, Weerakoon's academic achievements served more as steppingstones rather than as goals in themselves. In Sri Lanka, she served as the coordinator of the National Reconciliation Secretariat and, in 2016-17, the civil society coordinator for the country in the **Open Government Partnership**, a global initiative that promotes collaboration between government ministries and nongovernmental organizations. In that role, she helped craft a national action plan to address crucial issues related to health, the environment, corruption, and access to information.

For the last nine years, Weerakoon has worked at the United Nations **International Organization for Migration**, where she has taken leading roles not only in Sri Lanka, but in such far-ranging destinations as El Salvador, the Bahamas, and Micronesia, mediating disputes, supporting disaster recovery, and combating sexual violence. In Bangladesh, home to Kutupalong, the largest refugee settlement in the world, Weerakoon served as IOM's refugee support officer. In that capacity she helped design a social cohesion strategy and coordinated efforts to address the Rohingya refugee crisis.

In June, Weerakoon was honored for her work with the Rotary Alumni Global Service Award at the **Rotary International Convention** in Calgary. During her seven-minute speech, she challenged Rotary members to ensure that graduating peace fellows have the resources to best employ their newly acquired skills. "Rotary does not just spark change," she said. "It cultivates generations of it. Let's make sure we have the valuable insights from the post-fellow fraternity ... that will help Rotary build a mechanism to continue to carry the legacy forward."

Her speech offered only hints of the things she has accomplished as an internationally respected peacebuilder. Instead, she emphasized how Rotary had been there for her at each step of her life's journey.

This story originally appeared in the January 2026 issue of Rotary magazine.

Rotary Inaugurates New Peace Center at Symbiosis International University (SIU)

Applications for Rotary's one-year Postgraduate Diploma Program 2027 at SIU will be open from 1 February -15 May 2026

In a significant step toward supporting peace and development, the Rotary Peace Center at Symbiosis International University (SIU) was inaugurated on 26 January 2026.

A culmination of the ethos, vision, mission, and expertise of both Rotary International and Symbiosis, the center is situated on Symbiosis' scenic 400+ acre Lavale campus in Pune. It offers a fully funded one year postgraduate diploma program in Peace and Development Studies. The program has been designed for mid-career professionals working in different sectors of peace and development either within Asia or Asian communities.

"In this interconnected world, peace can no longer be viewed as an abstract ideal; it must be cultivated through institutions that combine knowledge, ethical leadership, and action. Rotary believes that sustainable peace is built when education empowers individuals to serve beyond borders and think beyond divisions," said **Francesco Arezzo, Rotary International President (2025-26)**. "The establishment of the Rotary Peace Center at Symbiosis International University reflects Rotary's commitment to nurturing leaders who understand and act with integrity towards a cause. Through this initiative, the center will contribute not only to regional peacebuilding in Asia but to a stronger global framework for shared responsibility," he added.

For **Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar, Principal Director of Symbiosis and the Pro Chancellor of Symbiosis International University**, "The establishment of the Rotary Peace Center at Symbiosis International University aligns closely with the core values of Symbiosis and is especially meaningful as it coincides with our 55th anniversary. Founded by Prof. Dr. S. B. Mujumdar, based on the ideal of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*", the mission of Symbiosis was to bring together students from across India and around the world to encourage international understanding and a spirit of brotherhood. Our visionary founder believed that providing quality education was the only way to promote international understanding."

The Rotary Peace Center at SIU will welcome up to 40 Rotary Peace Fellows each year.

"With India's rich diversity and complex social landscape, the Rotary Peace Center at Symbiosis International University will offer unique opportunities for cultivating leaders who can navigate conflict with empathy and innovation," said **Bharat**

S. Pandya, Trustee, The Rotary Foundation (2022-2026). “By collaborating with Symbiosis, we are creating a platform where emerging and experienced peacebuilders can gain the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to address local and global challenges. This center will help in nurturing a new generation of leaders in Asia, dedicated to strengthening dialogue, understanding, and sustainable peace,” he added.

Applications for Rotary’s one year postgraduate diploma program at SIU will be open from 1 February – 15 May 2026. Visit rotary.org/peace-fellowships to learn more about Rotary Peace Fellowship programs and how to apply.

“The Rotary Peace Center at SIU will cater to the greater Asia region, integrating an interdisciplinary approach with experiential learning. The one year postgraduate diploma program will be offered in a blended learning format to empower mid-level professionals working in different spheres of peace and development, to advance their engagement in sustainable and actionable outcomes for social change in Asia,” said Dr. Sulakshana Sen, Center Head, Rotary Peace Center at Symbiosis International University.

Rotary currently awards up to 170 **fully funded fellowships** for dedicated peace and development leaders from around the world to study at one of its eight peace center programs. Since 2002, Rotary Peace Centers have trained more than 1,800 individuals for careers in peacebuilding, and program alumni serve as leaders in governmental and non-governmental agencies, international organizations, and more.

District News



District Holi meet on 7th March '26 at Purulia

Club News



GML coverage of WASH project initiated by RC Calcutta Metro City with RC's Belur, Calcutta Mayfair, Calcutta Pointers & Calcutta Yuvis inaugurated by DG Dr Ramendu Homchaudhuri and P D G Shyamashree Sen.

Congratulations



Congratulations to our Club's Honorary Member Pandit Tarun Bhattacharya on being conferred with Padmashri (India's 4th highest civilian award), the announcements as made by MHA

ministry on the eve of Republic Day and the President of India shall bestow the award at a later date at the Rstrapati Bhawan. Apart from media across India, GML-0 January issue also published the news.

Greetings

