**Rotary Peace Center holds the 5th Capstone Conference 2024 : Ugandans Called to Embrace Positive Peace for National Development**

The Rotary Peace Center at Makerere university on 21st February 2024, hosted the 5th Capstone conference where the 5th Cohort of fellows presented social change initiative reports. New Peace scholars (cohort 7) were brought on board to understand the journey of collaboration and to share a collective commitment to the idea that peace is an ongoing process.

The fellows responded to different challenges in their local communities and through their social change initiatives have contributed to existing peace building and development initiatives using new approaches with one common goal of a more peaceful world.

Conference goers were implored to explore opportunities to embrace and engage in meaningful dialogue and ideas and strengthen their resolve to create a more peaceful and just world.

Participants were also challenged to uphold the values of compassion,empathy and cooperation as they work towards building bridges of understanding and reconciliation in their communities and beyond.

The conference held under the theme, “Achieving peace through collaboration and community engagement”, was graced by the Vice Chancellor Makerere University as Chief guest represented by his Vice in charge of Academic Affairs Assoc. Prof. Umar Kakumba.

Prof. Kakumba hailed the Peace Rotary Centre for promoting peace and development in communities.

“Today, the Rotary Peace Fellows join a network of Makererians championing change and development nationally and globally. Your journey here at Makerere has been cultured, and through the Peace Center, we pride ourselves on having impacted 72 communities in 42 countries globally”, he reported

Kakumba called on all Ugandans to embrace different cultures, aspirations and traditions of the communities to promote peace. The professor noted that Peace is not the absence of war on grounds that there can still be a lack tranquillity even when there is no war.

“As agents of change for peace and development, you need to understand the versatility that conflict resolution is not something one can master through textbooks; one must go there, engage with the community, and be prepared to get into the trenches. To understand people, you have to know their histories and grievances. Our approach, at Makerere University through the Rotary Peace Center, focuses more on community involvement and development”. He advised

Describing youth as critical pillars of society, Prof. Kakumba advised them to play a role through economic empowerment if sustainable peace and development is to be achieved. He stressed that underdevelopment in itself is a threat to peace.

Through peace projects, Kakumba emphasized that youth are part of the future that upholds community transformation.

“The projects implemented by Cohort 5 are a manifestation of the dynamic definition of peace. In this conference today, we will understand that peace can be achieved through basics like health, education, climate change, and economic empowerment.

Let us continue to learn and live in a world where education and knowledge can be used in the pursuit of peace. As you stand on the threshold of a new chapter, remember that it is these individual contributions that will calculatedly and cumulatively build lasting positive Peace change in Africa and beyond”. Prof. Kakumba stated.

The Principal CHUSS represented by her Deputy Associate Prof. Eric Awich Ochen was drawn by the theme of conference, “Achieving peace through collaboration and community engagement”, commended the peace scholars for the tremendous projects implemented in their respective countries.

“Everything that we do is important. Our generation cannot solve all the problems but we must play our role to be able to make a difference in the communities and create a better humanity”. Said Awich.

Prof. Awich welcomed the Cohort 7 peace fellows and encouraged them to follow keenly.

**Makerere University Model replicated across the world- Rotary International**

The representative of Rotary International and Rotary Uganda and District Governor, Dr. Mike Ssebalu welcomed new scholars of cohort 7. to Uganda.

Rotary, he explained is an international organization of universal appeal which believes in doing good in the world.

“Creating peace, sustaining peace and guaranteeing peace is one of those good things that every Ugandan should be proud of. Our vision statement states that together we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change across the globe, in our community and in ourselves”, Dr. Ssebalu said

The conference he said, attests to the fact that they have come together as Rotary, as Makerere and as individuals and peace scholars to create lasting change.

He implored peace scholars to be part of the process of creating lasting change across the globe communities and themselves.

He said. Rotary is proud to be associated with Makerere University in this great initiative noting that, they had gotten the best they would have ever got.

“Makerere has proved to be the best partner we chose to work with and Rotary International is indeed very appreciative and happy with the work you are doing to the extent that the Makerere model is being replicated in all the peace centers that have been created ever since.

A lot of lessons have been learnt in terms of commitment, initiatives, innovations and in terms of creativity and Rotary is picking those lessons and replicating across the world”.

Ssebalu thanked the university leadership at different levels of the value chain and all stakeholders stressing that Rotary appreciates and is satisfied with the performance.

To the peace scholars, Dr. Ssebalu implored them to take time to explore the tourism potential of Uganda, learn the culture and associate closely with Ugandan people adding that Ugandans are very welcoming and should therefore feel at peace, enjoy their stay and meet their expectations.

He said, they came as individuals but should go back as a team pledging that Rotary is available to support in all ways and that homes of Rotarians are open for fellowship and interaction.

The Director of the Makerere University Rotary Peace Centre Assoc. Prof. Hellen Nambalirwa Nkabala expressed pride in cohort 5 congratulating them on the job well done.

The Director thanked Rotary for accepting to work with Makerere university especially the department of Religion and Peace Studies and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

“On the day like this we continue to celebrate our partnership with the Rotary foundation. It is indeed an honor for us to run this joint program and it is one of the kind that is practically showing what experiential learning should be. Through this program, we have been able to influence changes becoming more practical”, she said

Prof. Nkabala welcomed cohort 7 to the conference expressing hope that they would be able to see and learn from what their colleagues in cohort 5 have been doing. The director, recognized and appreciated the college leadership, coordinators, academic mentors, members of the advisory board, academic community, Makerere university community plus all stakeholders for their support to the program.

“We have done art and peace building, agriculture and peace building, we have had CoNAS come in for tree planting for peace and CHS taking care of health for peace fellows and they have received executive services”, Prof. Nkabala acknowledged.

“I can only assure you that the kind of projects that we are going to look at are impactful projects that is why we call our fellows change agents. They have been able to create change in different communities. Today we are celebrating 15 countries and 20 social initiatives”, Prof. Nkabala reported.

**Cohort 5 embraced Performing Arts as an intervention for social change**

Speaking on behalf of the chair academic board committee, the deputy, Prof. Sylivia Antonia Nannyonga Tamusuza said it is in cohort 5, where they have had a project using Performing Arts as an intervention to social change.

She described Makerere university as privileged to have this program. She thanked Rotary international as well as Rotary Uganda and all partners for allowing the university to have such a diverse program.

“This program is the only program that has such a wide representation from different countries. To date, we have 131 fellows that have gone through this program represented from various countries which shows that Makerere is a global and international university”. Prof. Tamusuza reported.

She said the number of students applying for the program is overwhelming and they take on only 20 -21 students annually in two admissions. She congratulated all fellows that have gone through the program urging them to be good ambassadors of the university.

Prof. Tamusuza thanked the university for the opportunity accorded to be part of this program.

**By**

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