



Ivory Coast resident is 1st polio survivor to be Peace & Conflict Resolution Fellow

Kouame Remi Oussou makes Rotary history as the 1st polio survivor to receive our Peace & Conflict Resolution fellowship. Kouame Remi was born 1 October 1967 in Zuenoula, a small village located near Yamoussoukro, the political capital of the *Republique de Cote d'Ivoire* which is commonly translated into English as **Ivory Coast**.

Before Rotary initiated the Polio Eradication Program in the 1980s, Kouame Remi's parents did not know about the existence of a polio vaccine. Kouame Remi contracted polio at the age of 18-months. A lack of adequate health care and rehabilitation services prevented his parents from finding him the medical attention he needed. Today he has no use of one leg; he was evaluated as having an 80% physical disability. He walks with the aid of a crutch.

Unlike many rural families in his region who keep their disabled children hidden at home, Kouame Remi's parents allowed him to attend school and to enjoy the same educational benefits as his able-bodied brothers and sisters. His parents always encouraged him and have never lacked faith in his abilities. In school, Kouame Remi excelled. He has exceptional language skills. Besides his native Baoule and French, he is fluent in English, Spanish and German. He has lived through the dangers of war and the sad decline of his country that used to be, by far, the most prosperous in the sub-region prior to the onset of the conflict. His country is currently divided into two. Although most of the violent fighting ended in 2004, the situation in the Ivory Coast remains tense today. The UN has established a peace force called the UNOCI (United Nations Operation in the Ivory Coast) that maintains the current stalemate.

Kouame Remi was selected as the first candidate ever proposed by District 9100 for the Rotary Centers for International Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution fellowship. District 9100 is a multi-language district covering 14 countries in West Africa. His candidacy was finalized at Rotary's competitive world-level selection. He was a-

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signed to and accepted by the Rotary Peace Center at the prestigious International Christian University in Tokyo, Japan.

Kouame Remi's participation in the peace studies program marks a number of Rotary firsts: first Ivorian, first polio survivor, and indeed, the first participant from any French speaking country in Africa to participate in the Rotary Peace Center Fellowship program. While working towards a Masters Degree in Peace Studies at the Rotary Peace Center at the International Christian University in Tokyo, he hopes to focus his research on the role of the United Nations in peace keeping operations in African conflicts.

Kouame Remi aspires to become a Rotarian and obtain employment at the UN Directorate of Peacekeeping Operations after his studies.

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