

Introduction to the **African Rotary Community Mediation Initiative (ARCoM)** Empowering Communities to Resolve Disputes

The consolidation of democracy in states on the African continent since the 1960s continues to be work in progress. On 9 July 2002, former South African President, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, chaired in Durban, South Africa, the transition from decolonisation to development when the 1963 Organisation of African Unity was transformed into the African Union.

The AU's responsibility is to foster peace, stability, development, security and prosperity on the continent.' The AU sets the norms and practices of peaceful governance and community relations.² Implementation of these guidelines is the responsibility of state, non-state, faith based, educational and civil society groups.



Rotary International (RI) aligns itself with the peace-building objectives of the AU. In doing so it continues its history of international peace-building which dates back to its role in the creation of the United Nations. Rotary International has recently established its first African Peace Centre at the University of Makerere in Uganda. Rotary Peace Centres at Universities around the world graduate peace-fellows advancing the academic discipline of peace-building.

Africa's oldest Rotary Club is the Johannesburg Rotary Club established in 1921. To celebrate and to contribute to the peace-building goal, a number of Southern African Rotary Districts have formed a steering committee which is driving an initiative to train one hundred community mediators to international best practice level.

The districts involved are 9350, 9370 and 9400 which embrace Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, the southern part of Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa.

Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBBI) is represented on the steering committee of this initiative and it will provide, along with local academics, accredited training in community mediation, and assist with ongoing monitoring by Rotary Clubs who will be supported by a global grant which is presently taking shape. We call it the African Rotary Community Mediation (ARCoM) project in which Rotary partners with MBBI. We promote practical mediation at community level to stabilise communities in Africa, to build on the intellectual work of African universities.

ARCoM will provide a platform to establish a conflict prevention, community mediation initiative which involves building work within and between communities; expanding this ethos to non-Rotarians who share Rotarian values and in time become part of the larger Rotary family.

¹ The Constitutive Act of the African Union at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf accessed 25 August 2020.

² Souaré, Issaka, K. (2014), 'The African Union as a norm entrepreneur on military coups d'état in Africa (1952–2012): an empirical assessment,' in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 52, pp 69-94.