



**BAU** BAĞÇEŞEHİR  
UNIVERSITY

*The Otto and Fran Walter Rotary Peace Center | Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul | Cohort 1 Report*

## The Otto and Fran Walter Rotary Peace Center BAU

<b>13</b> Peace Fellows	<b>10</b> Weeks On-Site	<b>4</b> Field Trips	<b>12</b> Countries Represented	<b>3+</b> Extracurricular Workshops
----------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------------	---

### About the Program

Cohort 1 of the BAU Rotary Peace Fellowship began its on-campus training on February 10, with 13 Peace Fellows from 12 countries arriving at the Otto and Fran Walter Rotary Peace Center to begin a 10-week intensive, multidisciplinary program. The cohort completed its on-site phase in April 2025 and moved into the implementation period for their Social Change Initiatives (SCIs).

Throughout the program, fellows attended courses four days a week, led by experienced scholars and practitioners, combining academic instruction with field experience and extracurricular cultural activities. A major highlight of the term was a two-day simulation workshop facilitated by Conflictus, in which fellows assumed the roles of stakeholders in a fictional conflict and post-conflict society, engaging in negotiation, coalition-building, and crisis management to practice strategic thinking, empathy, and effective communication in a controlled, dynamic environment.

### Peace Fellows

- |                                       |                                    |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Havva Şeyda Bodur, Türkiye         | 2. Suaad Abdo, Yemen&Germany       |
| 3. Karla Marie Jordan, USA&Iraq       | 4. Gabriel Adam Bell, USA&Israel   |
| 5. Shee Kupa Shee, Kenya              | 6. Morad Al-Qadi, Jordan           |
| 7. Angela Antonova, Bulgaria          | 8. Nasreen Akhtar, Pakistan        |
| 9. Musferah Mehfooz, Pakistan         | 10. MD Harun Or Rashid, Bangladesh |
| 11. Jenna-Lee Strugnell, South Africa | 12. Mohamed Mahmoud Ahmed, Somali  |
| 13. Mariam Al-Masry, Egypt            |                                    |

## Program Launch & Distinguished Visits

---

### Building Peace Together — Presidential Visit (February 2025)

Just one week after the Fellows arrived, the Center welcomed Rotary International's 2024–25 President Stephanie A. Urchick, alongside Aide to the RI President Tom Gump and Rotary Foundation Chair of Trustees Mark Mahoney, for the "Building Peace Together" event. The occasion honored the Presidential visit to the Center, featured the unveiling of a Peace Pole at the BAU Future Campus, and included an award ceremony for a global high-school essay competition organized by the Istanbul Rotary Club.

### Presidential Peace Conference: Healing in a Divided World

Fellows also attended the Presidential Peace Conference hosted by Rotary International. The Center contributed a keynote address by BAU Rector Prof. Esra Hatipoğlu and a breakout session on Climate Diplomacy delivered by Prof. Esra Albayrakoğlu, the Center's Academic Director.

### First Community Engagement Event

In their first two weeks, Fellows attended classes delivered by BAU instructors and Dr. Ebru Sokullu, CIFAL Global Network Associate Director at the UN Institute for Training and Research. Alongside coursework, Fellows took part in their first community engagement event at a local restaurant focused on Gastro-Diplomacy, sampling dishes from Antakya, Hatay, prepared by a local chef who rebuilt his life in Istanbul after surviving the 2023 earthquake.

## Field Trips

---

**Giresun (Black Sea Region):** Focused on environmental peacebuilding and community resilience, including visits to women-led cooperatives and local sustainability projects.

**Ankara:** Fellows met with representatives from the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), the ILO (International Labor Organization), the Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications, the Department of Political Science at METU, and the Embassy of Canada, gaining insight into diplomacy and international collaboration in peacebuilding and peacemaking. The trip also included a visit to Atatürk's Mausoleum, Anıtkabir.

**Southeastern Türkiye — Mardin, Gaziantep & Hatay:** Fellows engaged with earthquake relief efforts, refugee support networks, and local and international NGOs including Save the Children, Bahar Organization, and JCI Hatay (Junior Chamber International Hatay), working in challenging post-crisis environments. They also visited key centers focused on women's empowerment and gender equality, such as ÇATOM and KAGİDEM, offering valuable insight into peacebuilding and community solidarity.

**Northern Cyprus:** Fellows explored the dynamics of frozen conflict, peacekeeping, and reconciliation through site visits. Discussions with the 4th President of Cyprus, Mustafa Akıncı, and the current Foreign Minister of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu, offered insight into the complexities of the Cyprus issue, bi-communal dialogue, and the role of political leadership in shaping peace processes. On their final day, Fellows met with Prof. Ahmet Sözen, Chair of the Department of Political Science and International Relations and Director of the Cyprus Policy Center at Eastern Mediterranean University, who delivered a seminar on the Cyprus Conflict. Under his guidance, Fellows

also visited Varosha (Kapalı Maraş), a resort town closed since the 1974 Turkish peace operation in Cyprus and a key symbol of the island's divided status.

## **Extracurricular & Community Engagement Activities**

---

### **Perfume Workshop with Koku Academy**

Fellows joined a perfume-making workshop led by Bihter Türkan Ergül from Koku Academy, learning about the history of scent and different fragrance notes before creating personalized perfumes — each a unique fragrance to remember their time at the Rotary Peace Center.

### **Weaving Workshop with Fırat Neziroğlu**

Fellows took part in a weaving workshop led by Fırat Neziroğlu, exploring colors, textures, and traditional Anatolian techniques reflecting the region's rich cultural heritage. Neziroğlu, an artist known for blending traditional weaving with contemporary art, shared insights from over 25 years of work reviving ancient fabrics and looms.

### **Roundtable: "Peace in Türkiye, Peace in the MENA"**

Fellows attended a roundtable at BAU's Southern Campus, hosted by Rector Prof. Esra Hatipoğlu and moderated by Executive Director Assoc. Prof. Yüksel Alper Ecevit. The dynamic Q&A format covered topics ranging from the impact of international developments on peace to social movements, migration, and human rights. Towards the end of the session, Prof. Hatipoğlu took time to listen to Fellows' reflections on their first ten weeks in the program.

## **Towards the Future: Social Change Initiatives**

---

As the on-campus phase concluded, Fellows moved into the next phase of the program: a nine-month period to carry out their Social Change Initiative (SCI) projects. Spanning youth leadership, inclusive education, trauma healing, conflict prevention, and community engagement, each project was independently designed by a Fellow to address a critical peace or development issue in their community. Fellows continue to receive academic support and mentoring as they design, implement, and assess their projects.

## **SCI Progress Highlights**

---

### **Shee Kupi Shee — Sasakawa Award Nominee**

Cohort 1 Fellow Shee Kupi Shee was honored in Geneva as a top nominee for the 2025 Sasakawa Award for Disaster Risk Reduction by UNDRR. As Director of Disaster Risk Management and Peacebuilding in Lamu County, Kenya, Shee leads impactful work at the intersection of humanitarian response and peacebuilding, particularly for refugees and host communities in disaster-prone areas along the Kenya border. His Social Change Initiative, developed during his fellowship at BAU, focuses on building resilience in disaster-prone, conflict-affected areas.

### **Şeyda Bodur — Women's Empowerment Training Program**

Şeyda Bodur's Social Change Initiative launched with guidance from her mentor, Prof. Ulaş Sunata of the BAU Department of Sociology. The program is a training initiative focused on women's empowerment and employment, centered on self-awareness, goal-setting, and confidence-building in a supportive peer environment. Participants receive mentoring support and a joint certificate from UNITAR and BAUMUS.

## **Peace Center Meetings & Distinguished Guests**

---

### **End-of-Term Review with the Host Area Committee**

BAU-RPC held an end-of-term review meeting with the Host Area Committee to reflect on the Cohort 1 experience, evaluate overall program progress, highlight key outcomes, and discuss areas for improvement. Attendees included Assoc. Prof. Y. Alper Ecevit (Executive Director, BAU-RPC), Suat Baysan (Host Committee Coordinator), Prof. Esra P. Albayrakoğlu (Academic Director, BAU-RPC), Seda Davran, and BAU RPC staff. Based on feedback from program stakeholders, RPC Fellows, local Rotary Clubs, and BAU, new measures were considered and implemented for future cohorts.

### **Roundtable with Nikhil Seth, former UN Assistant Secretary-General**

The Center welcomed Nikhil Seth, former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNITAR, to a roundtable titled "Building Global Agendas and Local Realities: The Role of Training and Governance," hosted by CIFAL Istanbul. BAU-RPC Executive Director Assoc. Prof. Y. Alper Ecevit served as moderator. Distinguished participants included Alex Mejia, Dr. Ebru Canan-Sokullu, Prof. Esra Albayrakoğlu, and department chairs from relevant departments at BAU, with attendees from BAU-RPC and the BAU Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences (BAU FEASS).

### **Visit of Kelly Wike (Rotarian, USA)**

The Center hosted Kelly Wike, a Rotarian from the USA, and her colleagues at the Future Campus. Accompanied by Academic Director Prof. Esra Albayrakoğlu, Host Area Coordinator Suat Baysan, Mustafa Öztürk, and BAU staff, the guests toured the campus and Center facilities and exchanged perspectives on the current term and future plans.

### **Visit of Kenneth M. Schuppert, Rotary Peace Center Committee**

The Center welcomed Kenneth M. Schuppert, an attorney and Rotarian serving on the Rotary Peace Center Committee (2024–2027) and as Chair of the Council on Legislation (2022–2027), along with Lynn Schuppert. Mr. Schuppert has held numerous Rotary leadership roles, including Past Rotary International Vice President, Past Rotary International Director, and Trustee of The Rotary Foundation. Hosted by BAU Rector Prof. Esra Hatipoğlu, Executive Director Assoc. Prof. Y. Alper Ecevit, Host Area Coordinator Suat Baysan, HAC Member Murat Sevinç, and BAU RPC staff, Mr. Schuppert toured the Future Campus and the Center, discussed plans for the upcoming cohort, and explored opportunities for strengthening collaboration between Rotary Peace Centers and academic institutions, highlighting the importance of peace in the MENA region. Having visited several Peace Centers worldwide, Mr. Schuppert expressed his enthusiasm for the unique role the Center plays in Türkiye.

## **Preparing for the Next Cohort**

---

As Cohort 1 concluded its on-campus phase, preparations began for Cohort 2, which started with a one-week online orientation on September 1 and joined the campus on September 6–7 for its ten-week onsite training phase. Insights and feedback from Cohort 1 were incorporated to enhance the curriculum, expand field partnerships, and strengthen the program's overall impact.