

Maasai peace scholar to study in Queensland

A series of extraordinary events have brought Rotary Peace Fellow, Wilson Kimeli Naiyomah to the University of Queensland for a post graduate program in peace and conflict studies.

When Wilson Kimeli Naiyomah returned home to Kenya months after witnessing the 9/11 attacks in New York City, he found that most of his fellow Maasai, a nomadic warrior tribe, had only a vague understanding of the events of that day.

Naiyomah, an incoming Rotary World Peace Fellow, shared firsthand accounts with the East African tribe, using the oral tradition it has relied upon for years. Deeply moved by his story, Maasai elders felt compelled to do something to help.

That something turned out to be a decision to send 14 cows to the US as a display of their sympathy and regret.



The village's gesture of compassion and healing was reported worldwide and years later prompted Naiyomah to collaborate with author Carmen Agra Deedy on an illustrated children's book about his tribe's response.

Released in the US in August, and available via Borders and Amazon, [*14 Cows for America*](#) explains how cows are sacred to Maasai and valued above all other possessions. "The cow is a symbol of life for us," says Naiyomah "What happened that day was devastating to me."

Although the cows were never shipped to the US – State Department officials decided it would cost more than the value of the herd to import them – the tribe decided to keep them for the Americans, setting the cows apart and vowing never to slaughter them.



Kimeli Naiyomah shows his mother the children's book, *14 Cows for America*

"The story focuses on healing and solution," says Naiyomah. "I think children can best understand that, because their hearts are so innocent. The future of a more compassionate world starts with them."

The entire experience also inspired Naiyomah to refocus his professional plans. Instead of going to medical school, Naiyomah will start preparing for a career as a peacemaker when he begins postgraduate work at the Rotary Center for International Studies at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, in February.

Looking ahead to his studies as a Rotary World Peace Fellow, Naiyomah says it is time for citizens who are concerned about the prevalence of war and conflict to take action.

“The Rotary World Peace Fellowship accords me the opportunity to study the nature of conflicts in our world today,” in his homeland in 2008.

“This showed me the vulnerability that exists for any section of the world to erupt into violence if peace is not deliberately and consciously promoted. Peace is a work – not a hope. We have to actively and creatively sow it.”

As a Rotary World Peace Fellow, Naiyomah will study the theories, techniques, and skills of effective peace-building and conflict resolution.

Longtime Nairobi Rotarian Michael Eldon predicts Rotary World Peace Fellows will become important agents of change.

“Peace workers like Kimeli will return to their countries and their communities to quietly help negotiate people out of fruitless conflict,” says Eldon, who has been very active in the club’s humanitarian and peace-building efforts.

“They will emerge with the wisdom and the strength to show those around them how to build rather than destroy.”

Launched in 2002, the Rotary Centers program is a master’s level program aimed at equipping the next generation of leaders with skills needed to reduce the threat of war and violence.

The Peace Fellows are selected every year in a globally competitive process in which applicants must demonstrate a commitment to peace through their personal, academic and professional achievements.

The Rotary Centers are located at leading universities in England, Japan, Australia, Argentina, and the United States. In addition to the two-year program, the Rotary Center at the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok offers an intensive, three-month course aimed at mid-level professionals in governments, NGOs, and international industry.

[For more info about the book, *14 cows for America* >>](#)

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