

## Salim Uqdah: A Journey Towards Global Peace

As I reflect on my journey toward becoming a dispute resolution professional and peace advocate, I am reminded of the winding paths, unexpected detours, and profound moments of clarity that have shaped my understanding of peace. My name is Salim Uqdah, and my commitment to fostering peace stems from a deeply rooted belief that it must begin with healing the light surrounding us before radiating outwards to our communities and the world.

My upbringing in a diverse and vibrant community in Yonkers, NY, and later Charlotte, NC, instilled in me a profound appreciation for the richness of embracing different cultures, perspectives, and beliefs. I witnessed the transformative power of dialogue, empathy, and solidarity from an early age. As a child of an interfaith marriage, intergenerational household, and a New Yorker during 9/11, I was raised to resolve conflicts and build bridges between strangers who turned into friends, family members, and communities. It prepared me to create enduring roots here in Charlotte since I was 14.

Though I was born in New York, Charlotte is the place that raised me and where I matured as a man. Through a large web of friends and chosen family, I saw firsthand how compromise amidst the tension, maintenance of intimacy, and radical honesty can unlock inner peace and belonging that serve as the foundation for promoting peace on a broader scale through community-minded action. This value led me to open my dispute resolution business, Uroboros Mediations, and become a certified mediator, divorce coach, facilitator, and consultant regarding dispute resolution.

Professional endeavors allowed me to create eviction diversion during COVID-19 that helped negotiate rent agreements between landlords and tenants. My board work with Care Ring and Playing for Others enriched Charlotte's health and youth. Among participation with various regional and national organizations, my inclusion in Miles Mediation & Arbitration's panel is a bright spot. I proved that successful mediators can be non-attorney mediators, which may provide more accessible pathways for other passionate people to enter the dispute resolution field. Lastly, I was humbled to be honored in 2022 as one of Charlotte's Top 30 Under 30 Future Leaders of Charlotte.

I feel proud of my achievements, yet I yearned to make an impact on a grander scale by creating dispute system designs, like the eviction diversion program. To pursue this yearning, I needed to equip myself with the tools to fuse legal dispute resolution with a foundation for sustainable unity, shifting from solely conflict intervenor to a peacebuilder. I came across the Rotary International Peace Fellowship, and this prestigious program allows individuals to further their knowledge and skills in conflict resolution and peace studies.

The Rotary International Peace Fellowship application process was rigorous and demanding, requiring a comprehensive understanding of global issues, a clear personal vision for promoting peace, and a commitment to service. I dedicated countless hours to crafting my application, drawing upon my experiences, academic background, aspirations for the future, and feedback from trusted families and friends.

The moment I received the news of my acceptance into the Rotary International Peace Fellowship program on Halloween was a surreal trick and treat. It validated my dedication, passion, and unwavering belief in the power of connection to transform into peace for communities and society.

As I prepare to embark on this new chapter of my journey, I feel a sense of gratitude, wonderment, and awe for the experience ahead and the fascinating people I will meet. To offer some wisdom to aspiring candidates and future peacebuilders, I offer the following advice:

- **Cultivate Your Philosophy:** Take the time to reflect on your values, beliefs, and aspirations. Cultivate the imagination to envision an ideal world and life based on your philosophy. Determine the steps to inch closer to the dream of peace and how the past propelled you to the desired future. This task may be the hardest step.
- **Get organized for the application process:** Review the Rotary Peace Fellowship information page. Set up designated study time in preparation for the 15th May 2024 application deadline. Reach out to your local Rotary club to familiarize yourself with the organization and see if you can obtain a mentor for this process. Continuously seek opportunities to expand your knowledge and skills in conflict resolution and peacebuilding and where you can make meaningful contributions.
- **Embrace Diversity of Thought:** Recognize the value of other people's unique perspectives, ask for assistance and help regarding your essays, and combine received feedback to foster understanding, clarity of messaging, and the appeal of your objectives across cultures and communities.
- **Be resilient:** Pursuits in the peacekeeping field without challenges and setbacks. Only 10% of the Rotary Peace Fellow candidates are accepted as finalists. Maintain your resolve in the face of adversity, and remain steadfast in your commitment to creating positive change by widening your options for potential opportunities and reexamining previously closed doors for possible entry because you can apply for the Peace Fellowship for the following year. By engaging in outreach to professionals, you may learn of projects and jobs that can fuel your passion while fulfilling an eligibility requirement for the application.

As I continue my global peace journey, I plan to continue the tradition of African-American peacekeepers such as Ralph Bunche, Martin Luther King, Bayard Rustin, Shirley Chisholm, and Andrew Young. I hope to excel in my Masters' in Peace and Conflict at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. I want to thank the Rotary Foundation and Rotarians who endorsed me through this process. I aim to ease the disconnection, isolation, and pain our modern world suffers by creating forums and systems that empower us to embrace our humanity in our personal and professional lives.

The world may be on the precipice of global strife, but necessity breeds innovation. Tenacious leadership can have us all embody the spirit of unity, compassion, and understanding that forward inconceivable progress. Rotary International was born out of a need for this leadership. I desire to be a tenacious leader and have my collective efforts pave the way for a more peaceful and harmonious world for future generations.

