

# Why a Public Library in Kigali

The Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga, chartered in October 2000, recognizes the significance of reading and books to a strong nation and people. For this reason, the Club has committed itself to building a public library in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, over the next two years. The Club is working to create the Kigali Public Library (KPL) with assistance from the Rwandan and international communities, including branch organizations such as the American Friends of the Kigali Public Library. Together, these individuals and organizations are known as the Kigali Public Library Committee (KPLC).

As its first major project, the Club decided to build a public library to counter a striking scarcity of books in Rwanda and the resulting lack of a culture of reading. For decades Rwanda has suffered from isolationism, violence, and extremism, culminating in the April 1994 genocide in which approximately one million Rwandans were killed. One historian of

the genocide, Philip Gourevitch, noted, "the dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust. It was the most efficient mass killing since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki."

In Rwanda, a public library will help to safeguard freedom and to aid development of a healthy democracy by providing access to information that enables citizens to make decisions necessary to govern themselves. By enriching minds and encouraging critical thought, a public library can combat the stultifying burdens of ignorance and conformity; its existence signifies the extent to which a democratic society values justice, knowledge, and truth.

The library will be free and open to the public, as the Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga recognizes that a key aspect of ending violence and preventing another genocide is to make information and ideas freely accessible to all Rwandans, regardless of income, religion, or other factors. As Andrew Carnegie said, "there is

not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration." Once users have access to the library's materials, they will have the opportunity to gain knowledge that will help in securing employment or starting a business. Without such an institution to promote independent thinking and informed decision-making, the dream of safety and equality in Rwanda will never be fulfilled.

Rwanda's first public library will play a major role in opening children's minds. A library can transport children from the commonplace to the extraordinary by providing them with works of non-fiction and fiction to broaden their knowledge and to inspire their creativity. From story hours for preschoolers to career and education planning for secondary students, the library will make a difference by encouraging the development of every individual who enters the building. These books will encourage children to

take an active interest in their government by sharing historical opportunities and events, which will promote conscientious action and provide a more secure future.

Finally, a public library in Rwanda will help to build a common national identity. This library will house special collections on such topics as Rwandan history and literature, which will serve to preserve the past and to validate and unify the entire nation.

### Library Location and Design

Having secured support from both the Government of Rwanda and Mayor of Kigali, the Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga is implementing a strategy to build, staff, and stock the best public library possible. The Government of Rwanda has generously granted a plot of land near the center of downtown Kigali, which is within easy walking distance or a short taxi ride for the majority of the population of Kigali. The plan for the library, which was judged most outstanding in an architectural design competition, is a modern

structure that reflects the elegance of Rwandan art and culture and will be a landmark for years to come. This design also provided the most flexibility, permitting the library to expand in size and quality if more funds are raised than initially anticipated. Once the library is established, the Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga will assist in establishing branch and mobile libraries, with the goal of providing literature to Rwandans throughout the country.

**Support for the Kigali Public Library**

The Kigali Public Library project is registered with Rotary International's World Community Service Projects Exchange. The project, number W04312, now appears on Rotary International's website at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org). The project has also been awarded its first Rotary International Matching Grant in partnership with the Littleton Rotary Club in Colorado. The grant is being used to establish an administrative office for the KPL, to be located at Utexrwa's textile plant until the library structure is completed.

Through used book sales, financial contributions, and in-kind donations, the Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga has been fundraising from individuals, corporations, and

organizations, including a generous donation from President of Rwanda Paul Kagame. To date, the club has received pledges of over US\$350,000 (154 million Rwandan francs) of which over US\$180,000 (79 million Rwandan francs) has been collected. The goal is to raise at least US\$1.2 million (622 million Rwandan francs) to build a modern library facility in Kigali. Since membership will be free, the Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga will hold periodic fundraising events after the library is constructed to ensure that the library will continue to function indefinitely.

**Timeframe**

The cornerstone of the new library was placed by Rwandan Prime Minister Bernard Makuza at the Groundbreaking Ceremony on May 11, 2001, and initial preparation of the land has since begun. If enough funds are raised, Rwanda's first public library will open in January 2002.

**Management and Sustainability**

After the library building is completed, staffed, and stocked with books and equipment, the Club will turn over supervision to a Library Management Board, which will include the top eight donors to the library, members of the Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga, and representatives from the Kigali Prefect's office and the Government of Rwanda. The Club will

provide the initial by-laws and governing structure of the library. The Board will then determine the best means for raising future funds to manage and sustain the library.

**Contributing to the Kigali Public Library project**

The Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga invites all interested parties to support this effort to create Rwanda's first public library and to create a better future for all Rwandans. After completion of the library, the club hopes to continue to develop new sections of the library, including an Internet café, research center, and a cultural forum.

The Rotary Club of Kigali-Virunga has adopted a tiered system of contributions to provide special privileges to those who provide major donations. The top financial contributors, dubbed "Premier Donors," are those who contribute US\$45,000 (20 million Rwandan francs) or more. For their generosity, they will have: the honor of attaching their name to one of the eight main rooms in the library (for example, Sorwathe Tea Plantation has already chosen the Main Reading Room and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International has already chosen the Conservation/Gorillas Room); a permanent seat on the Library Management Board; their name on the library letterhead and other promotional materials used to raise funds for

the library; VIP treatment at the library, their name on public TV and radio; their photograph or association/company logo in a Commemorative Booklet to be distributed at the opening of the library; their name on a Commemorative Plaque to be posted at the entrance of the library; and permanent VIP membership to the Friends of the Kigali Public Library Association. Some of these benefits will be provided to those who contribute less, including the gift of an "I Helped Build the Kigali Library" t-shirt and recognition on a special plaque in the library to every donor who contributes US\$100 (44,000 Rwandan francs) or more. Those seeking more information on how to make contributions, all of which are tax deductible, are encouraged to visit the Kigali Public Library website at [www.kigalilibrary.org](http://www.kigalilibrary.org) or to contact Beth Payne, Kigali Public Library Committee Chair, at [kigalilibrary@aol.com](mailto:kigalilibrary@aol.com).

*A financial or in-kind donation to this important project will ensure that Rwanda's children will learn to read and, through this library's books, will have access to a world filled with ideas and wonder. Please help to transform Rwanda's tools of destruction into tools of knowledge by giving generously.*