Tribute to Mrs. Rosaline Baatuolkuu Obeng-Ofori
Written and Delivered by Professor Stacey L. Connaughton
Delivered on Saturday, December 17, at St. Theresa’s Minor Basilica, Nandom, Ghana

She was a girl from Nandom who became a woman who inspired the world.

She was a teacher of French who taught us all to develop ourselves and build peace.

She was a fierce advocate for women and gender equality, and also a servant leader to her entire nation.

At Purdue University in the United States, Rosaline inspired a generation of students, some of whom had only met her once.

They saw in her what we all did: The power and beauty of the human spirit.

She was bold, vocal, expressive, assertive, daring, a change maker, and loving, caring, and giving.

In 2011, Rosaline agreed to become the West Africa Program Manager for the Purdue Peace Project, a political violence prevention initiative in West Africa and Central America based at Purdue.

In her five years in this role, Rosaline and her local peace committees fought tirelessly to prevent violence in their Ghanaian communities...and they succeeded.

Our approach to peacebuilding is based in the belief that local citizens (not outsiders from a foreign land) are the most suited to design and implement effective strategies for building peace. This approach is different than most. For that reason, we needed a courageous person to lead our efforts in West Africa. We found that person in Rosaline.

On Thursday morning, October 27, after speaking with Prof. on the phone and learning that Rosaline had passed, I made two phone calls. One to Jasmine Linabary a PPP team member in the US. And the other to Grace Yeany, our Liberia Country Director.

After those calls, I fell to my knees and wept.

I kept repeating two words over and over again - no and why.
"No" because I could not imagine a world without Rosaline in it.

“Why” because sometimes it seems as though those with the biggest of hearts are taken from us far too soon.

The “why” question is one that each of us can answer according to our faith tradition.

But as for me falling to my knees, crying, and saying “no” - I know exactly what Rosaline would say to that.

She would say: Treasure our special moments, take a deep breath, and get back up and do the work that you were put on this earth to do.

After all, as I came to learn in the 5 years I have known her, getting back up and doing the work she was put on this earth to do is what Rosaline did all of her life.

That is what her local peace committees have done and what they hope to continue to do, enshala (in Arabic). The Nandom Youth for Peace and Development, the Berekum Peace Committee, the Tuobodom Peacemakers Committee and the Concerned Youth of Tuobodom, and all of the others who worked with her to inspire peace. Those of us at the Purdue Peace Project will continue to journey with them. We all do so not only to honor Rosaline's legacy, but because building peace in one's community is an honorable thing to do.

The PPP team in the US and Liberia miss Rosaline greatly. We miss almonds and cashews, gushi stew, and smoothies; we miss her laughter, and singing; we miss the way she "encouraged" restaurant and hotel staff all over the world to be better, we miss her random WhatsApp messages; we miss her bear hugs as we exit the ACCRA airport; we miss her stories - like an entire fish making its way in her suitcase from Liberia to Ghana.

We miss her telling us about her daughter, Yaga, and how proud she was of her accomplishments and her independent and entrepreneurial nature, courage, and determination.

What perhaps we will most is the love Rosaline always showed her fellow human beings.

The last time I saw Rosaline in person was the last Saturday in September. She dropped me at the Kumasi airport after she had introduced me to the newest local peace committee she
had inspired in Tuobodom. I would return to Accra to fly back to the US. She would return to Sunyani to spend time with her beloved Prof.

Before I got on the plane, she gave me a big hug and a big smile and she said "Love you." "Love you," said the girl from Nandom, Ghana, to the girl from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. As I think about that moment now I cannot help but recall the words of the great African American poet Maya Angelou when she wrote: “For we are more alike than different, my friends. For we are more alike.”

The Purdue Peace Project family is expansive - it includes local peace committee members in Ghana, Liberia, and other parts of West Africa and Central America. It includes current and former students from Nigeria, China, India, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and all across the United States. All of us are storytellers. That means Rosaline's life story and the lessons she taught us, will live on all across the world, for generations to come.

Rosaline, I know you can hear me. In fact, I imagine you holding two cell phones, each with WhatsApp already downloaded and ready to go. So, from Agaptus, Christina, Dorothy, Shavonne, Kelly, Kai, Liliya, Jasmine, Arunima, Jess, Neva, Jen, Grace, Jessica, Paul, Kurt, Fritz, Milt, and me - you will always be a Purdue Boilermaker. And you will live in our hearts forever. Until we meet again, big hugs and may your beautiful soul rest in eternal peace.

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