



GENERAL SECRETARY'S ADDRESS

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Good morning. It's a great honor to be here in Hamburg, at Rotary's 110th international convention.

You know, someone once said that for humanity, "Core values serve as a lighthouse when the fog of life seems to leave you wandering in circles."

It's true for humanity. It's true for organizations. And it's certainly true for Rotary. Because leadership is one of our core values, and it has been a beacon, guiding our activities for the last 114 years.

So let me ask a question: The world is ready for Rotary to lead, but is Rotary ready to lead the world?

And I'll attempt to answer that question today by showing what leadership means to Rotary, in our past, our present, and our future.

Now, too often, we see a crisis of leadership in the face of today's urgent challenges. This is made worse by the fact that governments and philanthropies have limited resources. Decisive solutions are lacking for increasingly divided societies, our refugee crisis, for rising inequality, for social turmoil, and civic disengagement.

But I hope that everyone here is a pragmatic optimist, because Rotary's ability to lead at pivotal moments in history proves that positive change — real, transformative change — is possible.

So, let's start with our past, which we can define in two stages: Rotary's birth was about finding acceptance. And then, Rotary's evolution was about service and adventure.

Now, acceptance, service, and adventure might seem like separate concepts, but they are connected by one thing: leadership.

So let's start at the beginning of Rotary's story, with acceptance. When we think about acceptance, it often means finding a home in a cause greater than ourselves. And perhaps this is best illustrated with a story of someone you might recognize. A young person alone in a big city. A young person looking for friendship, looking for connections with other professionals, looking for a shared mission regardless of color or creed,

This is the text of the remarks as they were prepared. The spoken remarks may have differed slightly.

social status or nationality. A young person looking to make an impact but unsure where to begin.

Well, that man was Paul Harris, Rotary's founder.

So we see that Rotary's birth was about finding acceptance — that is, building trust, connections, and friendship.

But Paul knew that making a few new friends wasn't the same as leading for impact. And under Paul's leadership, a club that uniquely combined business networking and friendship became a social network for service. In Rotary, Paul found a home in a cause greater than himself.

So leadership during Rotary's birth was about finding acceptance. And through leadership our organization adapted to find meaning in service and adventure.

Rotary's first leaders had to be adventurous, because as we all know, without pushing the boundaries, without going where no service organization had gone before, we would never live up to our full name: Rotary *International*.

So let's take one early leader, Jim Davidson, who in the 1920s traveled 240,000 kilometers in two years, on a mission to expand Rotary in Southern Europe and Asia. Jim's amazing feats earned him the title of "the Marco Polo of Rotary."

Jim Davidson was a leader in the time of Rotary's greatest international expansion, when the movement spread rapidly to 50 new countries on six continents. Traveling by steam train and by car, by canoe and by elephant, he pitched the idea of Rotary to thousands of people. And, thanks to his efforts, 23 new Rotary clubs were born on his route from west to east. And I'm sure there are members of those clubs here today, from Athens to Cairo, from Jerusalem to Mumbai, from Colombo to Hong Kong.

So what are the lessons we can take from Rotary's early leaders? How do their actions — that is, leading for acceptance, service, and adventure — guide us today?

Well, the first insight to remember is that these leaders were made, not born. Paul Harris wasn't blessed with once-in-a-lifetime talents, nor was he a good student. In fact, he was expelled more than once from schools and universities.

But he was able to articulate a vision that inspired others. He was able to act on his vision to form a new social network well before anyone ever heard of Facebook or LinkedIn.

So as we look at the current, urgent challenges facing the world and Rotary, we see that leadership today is about making choices that will have the greatest possible impact in the future. And those choices are not made by one person. Instead, collective leadership is what matters.

Look at the way Rotary approached the threat of polio in the late 20th century.

Health experts weren't convinced that they should support mass vaccination against one single disease. So Rotary's members — and I emphasize our members in the plural here, as it wasn't the work of a single mythical leader — took the initiative to advocate for polio eradication. Their plan convinced the doubters — and you are all familiar with the

rest of the story —which brings us to the cusp of eradicating a human disease for only the second time in history.

This is the essence of leadership in Rotary. The audacity, the *audacity*, of a nongovernmental organization — not a government or multilateral institution like the United Nations — to believe it could take on a huge challenge and eradicate polio, to boldly lead where the world needed to go.

So we see that it's not about titles. It's certainly not about status. It's about joining together to take action.

But there's something else that has always been part of our DNA, that still guides our actions to this day. It's our special combination of leadership *and* integrity.

Because leadership without integrity is nothing more than self-interest. So our special blend of leadership *and* integrity defines us as people of action, mobilizing in response to challenges.

And our leadership has been and continues to be manifested on many different levels — from the role of Rotarians in drafting the UN Charter in 1945, to polio eradication, our Youth Exchange programs, our peace programs, our local club projects, and the work we do in our six areas of focus.

You can find it in leaders like Dr. Pia [Skarabis-Querfeld], who has been able to lead a few hundred people in treating many thousands of refugees in Berlin.

You can find it in leaders like Anne Riechert, a graduate of Rotary's Peace Centers, who was also living in Berlin and witnessed the flood of refugees entering Germany. She saw an opportunity, and together with her club members, she created a coding school for refugees to fill some of the many vacant tech jobs in Germany. Now, local startups have a new talent pool to meet their growing needs, while migrants hoping to integrate are able to demonstrate their value to the community.

Anne and Dr. Pia embody what leadership means in Rotary today — taking decisive action, with boldness and integrity, often with the help of other Rotary leaders, to serve those in need.

Now, we've covered leadership in Rotary in the past and in the present. So, how can we lead in the future? And the answer to that question depends on how well we can build on our history — how strongly we can take decisive actions for the future, while honoring our past.

Now, this is a special year in Rotary's history. This is the year when our new strategic plan will be rolled out.

This plan gives us a roadmap for leading into the future. It was designed, with your help, because Rotary needs to evolve to serve our rapidly changing world. The plan was tailored to serve the diverse demographics of our membership and the Rotary members of tomorrow. And it will be launched in the next Rotary year to keep our organization not only relevant, but thriving.

The plan is structured by four strategic priorities: to increase our impact, expand our reach, enhance participant engagement, and increase our ability to adapt.

Every one of us will need to lead in order to achieve these ambitious goals. If we do, together we can drive Rotary — the first social network — to be among the best in this century. And one way of leading is not just by being the best at what we do. It means being the first to try something new. To explore new territory like our original pioneers.

It means being innovative, it means thinking out of the box, growing Rotary through new and exciting club models. It means doing projects that are larger, scalable, sustainable, and more impactful.

So, today, it gives me great pleasure to share news with you of something that has never been done before. I can report that Rotary, with the help of Johns Hopkins University, is the first global service organization to conduct an empirical analysis of our volunteers' impact. The university's systematic method to measure volunteer impact is the only one officially recognized by the United Nations and the International Labour Organization.

And the preliminary findings provide a conservative, *conservative* estimate of more than 45 million hours of volunteer effort generated by Rotary members in a typical year.

Forty-five million hours. That is a truly impressive figure. But it's better than that.

Then, Johns Hopkins estimated the economic value of those hours. If communities had to pay for the services Rotary volunteers provide, it would cost them around \$850 million a year. And this figure doesn't even include the in-kind contributions and the money that Rotary clubs and The Rotary Foundation raise every year, which, I suspect, could easily double that figure!

This is a powerful demonstration of Rotary's impact. And it also provides a glimpse of what we can do if we can lead, with integrity, to pursue our vision of the future.

You know, the challenges before us are great. But one of Rotary's unique characteristics is that we are made up of leaders — leaders committed to creating lasting change — across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.

So, can we lead in a world where trust in society's institutions has eroded? Can we lead in a time when public anger at governments and international bodies has reached a fever pitch?

There is no doubt we can. Because I know that you will *Be the Inspiration* and will meet that challenge.

You know, Rotary's birth was about finding acceptance. Rotary's evolution was about service and adventure. And Rotary's future is about each of us — together, *together* — leading, with integrity, to seize every new opportunity to grow our organization, to connect, and to serve.

So let me close by posing again the question I asked at the beginning: Today's world is ready for Rotary to lead, but is Rotary ready to lead the world?

I think we all know the answer to that question.

Thank you and enjoy the convention.