



RI PRESIDENT'S CLOSING REMARKS TO THE ROTARY INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

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We are getting towards the end of this excellent convention. I realize that I am not exactly impartial, but I think it has been a wonderful gathering here in Toronto.

A convention is a highlight of the Rotary year for reasons that have nothing at all to do with where it is, who's in office, or even, dare I say it, what closing entertainment is planned. (It's going to be great here, by the way — and I want to thank the government of Canada for their help in bringing it to you.)

A convention is a highlight, because it is the one time of year that Rotarians from all over the world are able to physically come together, in one place. And year after year, even as our organization has become larger, and the distances that people have to travel to attend a convention have become greater, no proposal to do away with the convention, or even hold it any less often than annually, has ever gained much traction. Rotarians want that chance to come together — even if it's only for a few days, and only once a year.

It's important to us because in Rotary, that is how we do things. We do them together. Cooperation, friendship, partnership — these concepts are absolutely key in Rotary, and have been from the beginning.

It is striking how little significance each individual role has in Rotary, and that is very much by design. Very few Rotary appointments last more than a year; it is the office, and not the person in it, that provides the continuity.

You can't do a Rotary project alone, you can't become a Rotarian alone, and it often seems that no decision in Rotary is ever made without a committee. We work together in Rotary, because that is how we achieve. We leverage our contributions to do more together than we ever could do alone.

That is the idea we are built on. It is the principle that allows rather ordinary people, like me, to make a difference on a scale we could never aspire to in any other way.

Through Rotary, we can make a difference while still working in our jobs, raising our families, and carrying on our daily lives. Rotary exists alongside all of that. That is how

Rotary is intended to work, and that's why it does work so well for so many talented people with many responsibilities and many obligations. We are a team.

And that is how our team of 1.2 million members and 825 staff has been able to achieve all that has been done this year in the name of Rotary.

Juliet and I have been inspired by so many great Rotarians this year. One is my friend and hero Sylvia Whitlock, who became part of Rotary's history 30 years ago, when she became the first woman to serve as Rotary club president. What a difference women have made to our great organization!

And we have met thousands of the men and women of Rotary, too numerous to mention individually here, who are serving with enthusiasm, dedication, grace, and humility in every community where there is Rotary.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the tremendous inspiration Juliet has been throughout this great adventure. As the first partner of a serving Rotary president to come to the job as a past district governor, she has been a valued source of advice, ideas, and perspective. Thank you, Juliet. We are almost done.

The six peacebuilding conferences held around the world this year were a wonderful success, as was the peacebuilding summit before this convention, and I thank all those who organized them or took part.

After the Vancouver and Coventry conferences, there was the planting of a sapling grown from the Peace Tree in Hiroshima, Japan. We planted it as a reminder of the need for peace in our world. But to me, those little trees seemed more a reminder of how many people there are, in Rotary and outside of it, who care about peace, and are working to build a more peaceful world.

Throughout this Rotary year, many Rotarians have chosen to support the Endowed Fund in The Rotary Foundation that Juliet and I established to support Rotary's work for peace. I asked for contributions to this fund instead of personal gifts, and I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to it, as well as everyone who has contributed to our Foundation's work for peace, through all of its areas of focus. It is the Rotary way that we don't always know exactly whose life our good work touches — but all of you have, in one way or another, helped to build a more peaceful world.

At events such as these, we tend to talk, and to hear, about the biggest projects — the ones that affect the most people, or involve the most partners. But every project is making a difference — no matter its size, or its scale.

Like the hospital hyperbaric center we visited in Tel Aviv, supported by Rotarians, which is providing life-changing treatment to patients recovering from brain injuries — including one little girl, who arrived paralyzed and went home walking.

Or the junior football program in Antofagasta, Chile, which has been run by Rotary clubs for decades, giving disadvantaged children a much-needed way to play.

Other projects helped our fellow Rotarians —our teammates — such as those whose homes were destroyed in the wildfires a few months ago in California. It was a very emotional occasion when Trustee Brenda Cressey and I presented replacement Paul Harris regalia to those who had lost their medallions, and almost everything else.

Do you ever think about why it is that you stay as a member of a Rotary club? Not why you joined, but why you stay. I believe there are three main reasons.

One is the friendship of the great people we meet through Rotary, because we all like to be associated with good people.

The next is the work that we do — because we all want to be part of making a difference.

The third is related to that — and is best summarized by something I saw along the way in my Rotary travels. Having visited 59 countries these last two years, there aren't many decent in-flight movies that I haven't seen. But on a recent long, looong flight from Hong Kong to Chicago, I actually found one. It wasn't the movie itself that was memorable, but the advertisement the airline showed beforehand — talk about a captive audience. It was for a bank, and the final line in it was “Our values define us.”

I'm sure it wasn't the first time these words have been used, and I don't know about the bank, but it seems to me that it could have been an advertisement for Rotary.

Because in Rotary, our values define us, via The Four-Way Test, our motto of Service Above Self, and above all, through our actions. Those values must be defended, and preserved, by all Rotarians through whatever changes we may choose to embrace in Rotary. They are what define us — they are what we are. They are what makes Rotary special, and what makes us different.

Rotary is not like any other organization. But that does not mean that we are alone in what we do and the things we care about. Rotary is not alone in our desire to make the world a better place.

Just as each Rotary club is part of the larger community of Rotary, Rotary itself is part of a larger humanitarian and development community — of governments, organizations, and individuals working together toward the shared goal of a better, more peaceful, more sustainable world.

And as we heard this week, those goals are far more critical to our shared future than even our greatest project, the goal of eradicating polio, has ever been.

Because, to quote Helen Clark, from whom we heard earlier: “Ours is the last generation which can head off the worst effects of climate change, and the first generation with the wealth and knowledge to eradicate poverty. For this, fearless leadership from us all is needed.”

To that I would add that we not only need fearless leadership — but also fearless partnerships. Only through partnerships — working together fearlessly for common goals — will we come to the world that we want: a world without extreme poverty, where no one lives with hunger, where every child can grow, and learn, and thrive — wherever they live, whoever their parents are, and no matter whether they were born a boy or a girl. A world where we look after our shared resources wisely, and safeguard our one planet with care and concern.

In Rotary, as in life, idealism and reality, optimism and practicality can, and must, exist side by side. Leaving our children a polio-free world won't seem like such an important accomplishment if they can't breathe the air or drink the water. We aren't working to build our communities to allow them to be destroyed by the next round of conflict.

We want our countries, and our children, to live in safety, and prosperity, and peace.

We want to make a difference — and know that it is going to last.

For that, we need to work together — and it is vital that we *Be the Inspiration*.

Thank you all.