



YOUR SUPPORT FROM ROTARY STAFF

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RI General Secretary

Good afternoon!

It's great to be here today, addressing this impressive class of incoming district governors.

Just as all of you have come here to learn and be inspired, we at the RI Secretariat look forward every year to the opportunity at the International Assembly to learn from, and be inspired by, our district governors-elect. We at One Rotary Center in Evanston, and in our international offices, work with one goal in mind: to strengthen and support our 34,000 clubs and 1.2 million members. We develop the tools, we administer the grants, and we provide the information, the connections, and the resources to help your clubs do more together than they could alone.

It's also our job to maintain a bird's-eye view of Rotary across zones, districts, and clubs by tracking trends in membership and financial stability; thinking strategically about how to maximize Rotary's impact on a global scale; and providing a platform that enables Rotarians to work as effectively as possible on both the local and international level.

And it is here, at an International Assembly, that we see all of that work come to life.

We get a chance to hear about what you're doing, the challenges you're facing, and how you're addressing those challenges. We learn how you're using the tools we've developed, and get the chance to talk together about how to make those tools even better. We get to see Rotary in action through your eyes — the eyes of some of Rotary's most knowledgeable, and most passionate, members.

2014 was a year of many achievements in Rotary, and I want to start out today by sharing some of those accomplishments with you.

Number one on the list, of course, is the progress we've made in our work to eradicate polio. You've all heard Hamid Jafari tell us about the encouraging news from Africa: no new cases since last August.

Nevertheless, we know how fragile this progress is, and how easily it could still be undone. But at the same time, there are no words in the English language that can overstate the magnitude of what we have achieved in polio eradication, or the pride I feel every day of being associated with an organization that is on the verge of leaving the world a gift that will last for as long as humans inhabit this planet.

And, that pride is based not only on our achievement, but in the understanding of just what it took — what it continues to take — every day to keep Africa at zero, India at zero, every country except for Pakistan and Afghanistan, right now, at zero. Because when you look back at the last 25 years of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, the scale of the endeavor is simply incredible.

Now, Rotary on its own has raised a great deal of money for polio, an incredible amount. But the amount we've contributed to the effort is only part of the story. What we've done, what has also taken us to where we are right now, is advocacy. We've kept polio in the news; we've kept it in the spotlight; we've pushed governments to commit funds; and we're pushing them to make good on their promises.

And we've built partnerships to leverage our resources, making sure to get the most out of every dollar we bring in. Our most recent agreement with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will bring up to \$525 million of funding to polio eradication, with their commitment to match Rotary spending 2-to-1, up to \$35 million per year for a total of five years. We've now reached our goal for the second year in a row, and the Gates Foundation just released the second full match amount of \$70 million last week.

As an added benefit, the health infrastructure we've put in place over the last decades to combat polio is continuing to make a major difference to local health in many parts of the world. The labs, administration, data, and expertise that we developed in fighting polio have been crucial in the efforts to combat malaria, measles, and Ebola. We've provided a successful model for others to emulate in terms of health care, and that model is being followed, with some very encouraging results.

So that is why we cannot give up now. We need to stay the course and continue to do all that we can to ensure that in 2018 we declare victory and celebrate zero cases of polio from here to eternity.

Globally, recognition of Rotary's work is increasing: not just the quality of our work, but the quality of our governance. In 2014, The Rotary Foundation earned a top rating of four stars from Charity Navigator, one of the leading rating agencies for U.S.-based charities. While we continue our fundraising and stewardship efforts to ensure that Rotarian donations are directed to sustainable change, the percent of the Foundation's expenses compared to our contributions continues to decrease. And we're able to do this because we are so good at leveraging our resources — our volunteer work, our local knowledge, our ability to get more done through our Rotary network.

Over the past two years we have introduced a number of new tools and completed several new undertakings: the new grant-making model (what was known as Future Vision); the comprehensive Rotary brand strengthening initiative and our new visual identity; a new website; Rotary Club Central; Showcase; the Ideas platform; a more robust social media presence; and most recently, our new club invoicing process. Each of these will help Rotarians do even more and help Rotary grow and prosper in our second century of service to the world.

These metrics aren't just something to be proud of. They're something we can use, something we can build on. They help us attract more partners, scale up our work, be taken more seriously by governments, increase our reach, and bring in more members. Success begets success, and as I mentioned a few minutes ago we are about to achieve the greatest success of Rotary's history: the eradication of polio.

But we cannot be complacent; we cannot rest on our laurels. As we move well into our second century, the question that needs to be answered, the question that is the most critical right now for every one of us here in this room, is quite simple: What do we as an organization have to do — what can we do — to take all of these successes, all of these strengths, and build on them? How can we leverage these successes to do the most good we can, for as many people as possible?

Standing here looking out at all of you, I see Rotary — the organization that we are, on the ground, achieving so much, in 34,000 communities around the world.

And I think you'll understand when I say that looking at all of you here today — I can't help but see something else as well: the Rotary we could be.

We are a great organization. But we could be even more phenomenal. We're changing lives, all over the world, every day. But we could be changing so many more, and in more lasting ways.

We do so much in Rotary. But how much more could we do if we had more great members — twice, three times as many? What if we worked harder to leverage our resources in partnership with other organizations? What if we decided, together, that it's time to put everything on the table — time to take a clear-eyed look at the things that might be holding us back in Rotary — and change them?

What could we do? Well, I think the answer is as simple as the question. We could do pretty much anything we set our minds on.

All of us know we could be doing more. The decision we're facing right now is not what we're able to do, but what we're willing to do. Are we willing to make the thoughtful changes that we need to make in order to grow? Are we willing to change our traditions, shake things up where we need to, and agree that our No. 1 priority is Rotary's success — not just one year at a time, but over the long term?

Of course, there are certain traditions such as the emphasis on high ethical standards and club diversity that are timeless and universal bedrocks of our organization and should never change. But perhaps others have become more of an obstacle rather than a benefit.

Let's take the tradition of yearly change in leadership. It clearly has its strengths. But it has one big weakness: any truly significant new initiative requires five to 10 years of consistent effort to achieve results. We simply can't afford the zigging and zagging and the yearly change in direction that often comes with the annual changeover in our clubs, districts, zones, and international governance.

Let's allow ourselves to imagine for a moment what Rotary might look like if, instead of each new leader setting new goals, we worked on a five- or a 10-year cycle — in which each new leader picked up the baton from his or her predecessor and seamlessly worked to meet the goals set out in a detailed long-term strategic plan.

And as part of that strategic focus, how might Rotary look, if we decided to put less emphasis on attendance, and more on engagement? Maybe it's time we took a hard look at some of our most hallowed traditions and provided those clubs that want it the flexibility to operate as they think best. I suspect that we might find that we have made ourselves more attractive to more members if we made it easier for them to engage with us. Again, the key is not attendance but engagement.

What if we thought differently about our club and district dues structures? We talk so much about the \$54 annual Rotary International dues, yet this amount is a pittance when compared with the real costs of being a Rotarian — which is largely the club and district dues and the cost of meals.

What if we asked every club to hold an exit interview with every Rotarian who leaves? What if we aggregated that data, understood the forces that cause 100,000 Rotarians to leave our organization each year — and worked to change them?

What if we started engaging our Rotaract clubs as equals and found ways to integrate them into our Rotary club activities in a much more meaningful manner, and found better ways to support their work? Rotaractors are exactly the people we need in our organization. They are a big part of our future. We can't afford to lose them, and right now, we lose almost all of them: only 5 percent ever join a Rotary club.

So I'm asking all of you, in the coming year, to be voices for doing everything we can in Rotary, not just everything that's comfortable or easy or represents the way things have always been done. Be advocates for thoughtful, positive, and lasting change. We have a great tradition in Rotary, but it's our tradition. We made it and we own it — it doesn't own us — and if it no longer serves its purpose, we can change it.

I would also urge you to engage more with your communities. Yes, we need to be talking among ourselves — but we also need to be directing our communications efforts outward to the non-Rotary world. We need to be much more aggressive in organizing events in our communities and regions that are designed for non-Rotarians. And, I would humbly suggest, we need to take a hard look at how we're being perceived. Ask your communities what your clubs need to do to make them want to join you. It just might provide an impetus, and a roadmap, for taking us in a new direction.

We need to ask ourselves, very simply, what kind of Rotary do we want to be? And there isn't a right or a wrong answer to that question. Clearly, the current model works in many parts of the world and doesn't need to be tinkered with. But in other regions the membership numbers tell us that the market is simply not buying our product in the same way as it used to in the past. And this means that we need to be ready to adapt. I know very well, just as you do, that there are plenty of Rotarians who are perfectly happy with Rotary as it is, and plenty more who don't think beyond their own clubs. But I also know, as you do, that the more involved Rotarians get in their clubs and their activities, the more they see just what we can do, the more they want to do — and the more interested they become — in figuring out ways to do more and to do things differently.

For myself, in my wildest dreams I see a Rotary of 2 to 3 million members, that is active in every community; one that connects with and builds relationships with the entire community; one that mentors those looking to improve their skills — leadership, vocational, personal, social, educational, or others; one that partners with governments and NGOs in their community and around the world to end poverty, to wipe out preventable disease, to stop conflicts before they start. I see a Rotary where we are top of mind and tip of tongue for anyone in the community who wants to join an organization to give back, but also to network professionally and to gain lifelong friends, skills, and expertise. I see a Rotary where the best of every community is part of a Rotary club, and being part of a Rotary club brings out the best in us all.

That might sound a like a pipe dream. And yes, it is a bit ambitious, and yes, perhaps it is beyond our abilities right now.

But you know what? Not too long ago, the idea of eradicating polio seemed impossible, and ambitious, and beyond our abilities. It didn't stop us. Because we're not the kind of people who give up and go home the first time someone says, "You're aiming too high."

And I'm glad that we're not. And so are the 10 million kids who never got polio, thanks to the 1.2 million inspired and ambitious Rotarians who didn't listen to people telling them what they couldn't do.

I would like to conclude my comments today by honoring one of the very oldest Rotary traditions, one I hope we hang on to forever: and that's quoting our great founder, Paul Harris.

Many years ago he wrote, "If Rotary is to realize its proper destiny, it must be evolutionary at all times, revolutionary on occasions." Paul Harris was right then, and he is right now.

You are the ones who will Be a Gift to the World and help Rotary realize its destiny in the months ahead, and in the Rotary year to come, and in the years after that. And we at the Rotary Secretariat will be there

for you, in every way we can. I know that I speak for every one of us on the Rotary International staff when I say how proud we feel to walk through the doors of One Rotary Center every morning, knowing that our work supports your work, and that your work is changing the world, day by day, community by community.

Thank you very much.