



RI PRESIDENT'S CLOSING REMARKS

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5 June 2019

This has been quite a week, hasn't it? Are you going to leave Hamburg inspired? And have you captured many special moments?

My tenure as president of Rotary is rapidly coming to an end — 25 days, but who's counting? — but my commitment to this amazing organization and the work we do will go on. And the good news for me is that I get to continue that service with so many more friends than when I started.

So, in my final speech as your president, I want to talk a little about the amazing people I have met along the way. And on the screens in the auditorium, you'll see some of the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram messages I created during those travels. For those who've kept up with my social media posts and my numerous selfies, you have seen Rotarians at work doing service, our energized Rotaractors, and meetings with government and other officials. I will miss the constant communication.

But it's truly been an incredible year. And I want to start by talking about people especially near and dear to my heart — our Rotaract clubs, who are now members of Rotary International, thanks to the COL.

You will remember that the Beatles were four guys who accomplished quite a bit before their 31st birthdays. But compare them to Mozart, who wrote his first symphony at eight. Or to Joan of Arc, who led French troops into battle at 17. But those things happened long ago — times have changed, right? Bill Gates founded Microsoft at 24. Steve Jobs co-founded Apple at 21. Mark Zuckerberg and friends created Facebook at the age of 20.

When it comes to changing the world, age means very little. What does matter is the size of your dreams. We've become so used to telling young people to be practical, think about your future, and look to us as role models. What we really should be telling them, and ourselves, is to take your dreams and nurture them. Grow them. Dream bigger. There is no such thing as the impossible dream for Rotarians.

This past year, I've met so many amazing Rotaractors who do just that. Their dreams of a better world should inspire us, because we are living in their world, not ours. They understand the challenges of this age better than we do. They know what it will take to overcome the greatest challenges.

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

These are amazing young people who make me excited about the future of Rotary. This year, we shined a bright light on Rotaract and increased the number of Rotaract clubs by over a thousand. That's a great start — let's keep going. And, by the way, if Rotary clubs were growing at that pace, our membership numbers would be growing!

In Turkey, Rotaractors are visiting children in the hospital every Wednesday to lift their spirits by playing games with them. They've done that for 107 Wednesdays in a row. They are also mentoring new students at their university and teaching them leadership skills.

Yesterday, you heard a young man on this stage, Paul Mushaho. I had the privilege of first meeting Paul in Nairobi, at Rotary Day at the United Nations. Paul is a refugee, having fled to Uganda from the violence in his native Democratic Republic of Congo two years ago. If he can start a Rotaract club that can thrive in a refugee camp, imagine how many new clubs can spring up in your communities, in response to today's challenges?

In Dominica, a Rotaractor is recycling plastic refuse and making jewelry to sell to the tourists. When I asked what his biggest challenge was, he said, "We might run out of plastic refuse."

Judging by the young people I've met this year, Rotary has a very bright future. And their leadership is rubbing off on us as well. Rotaractors have a special affinity for environmental projects — this has inspired Rotary clubs across the globe to do some amazing work.

In Paranaque City, Philippines, Rotary is transforming a community by providing homes for the homeless who live by the river. Then they are moving them from the river and cleaning up the river environment to reduce disease, so the children can have an education and better health.

In India, the WASH in Schools program is bringing fresh water and sanitation to every single school. In the process, they are changing behavior not only in the schools regarding hygiene, but also at home.

And the incredible project in Puerto Rico where Rotary has created a program to bring together young people from different communities to learn teamwork through drama. This has given them an option so they don't have to join a gang. They now have a positive future.

In Colombia, Rotary is bringing stuffed animals to children in all the hospitals to have a friend to hug, personally handed to the children, and they have raised funds for The Rotary Foundation in the process.

In Ethiopia, all the Rotary clubs have shown us all how to get Interact, Rotaract, and Rotary all to work together on club projects. Incredible teamwork among our clubs.

Anyone who knows me also knows my deep affinity for the Haitian people. Haiti has been a huge part of my life, initially because it is a part of my district, but it then escalated when I helped with recovery efforts after the devastating earthquake that tore Haiti apart in 2010.

Many of you have heard the story of the pink Jeep that we provided to a group of midwives in Haiti. We had asked the midwives what we could do for them, and they told us they needed a way to reach expectant mothers in a remote part of the country. We supplied a Jeep, painted it pink, and put the Rotary logo on it.

Three years later, we went back to see how they were doing. They told us that they believed that the mortality rate for mothers and infants in that region had dropped by 50 percent. Last year, we discovered the pink Jeep no longer worked, so we bought a Land Cruiser for them and painted it pink. The midwives can now continue to save lives in that remote region of Haiti. Talk about sustainability.

My commitment to Haiti's future will continue with the HANWASH initiative. We are committed to providing thoughtfully managed and sustainable clean water and adequate sanitation to all the citizens of Haiti by the year 2030, along with the associated health, community, and economic benefits.

Paul Harris called on Rotarians to leverage their career expertise into service projects, so it shouldn't surprise you that this career hospital administrator would be especially inspired by the health projects that I have seen around the globe this past year. And the biggest medical project in the world is, of course, ending polio.

I hope you found the polio discussion yesterday informative about the challenges we face, and I hope you were inspired by the goals we have set and all the people committed to bringing them to life.

Never forget how far we have come. It's been your donations, your service, your persistence that have brought us to the brink of history. Nigeria is on track to begin the certification process this August. And for five years, India has been polio-free. We will rid the world of polio, and you will deserve the praise for getting it done. As we tackle this monumental medical challenge, Rotary also continues to do wonderful projects in all six areas of focus, and we saw some incredible examples this year.

Last fall, we paid a visit to a hospital in Jekabpils, Latvia. The maternal mortality rate at the hospital had remained stubbornly high due to a lack of diagnostic equipment and basic items like incubators. Twenty-one clubs from around the world joined forces for a global grant that provided what the hospital needed.

In Brazil, club members worked with fellow Rotarians in Japan on a global grant project that dramatically increased the capacity of an overstretched neonatal intensive care unit. New incubators, monitors, and other equipment have enabled the local hospital to save many more babies' lives each year.

And in Madagascar, a vocational training team from India of 19 surgeons, under the leadership of Past President Raja Saboo, performed 3,500 procedures in the eight days they were there and trained 12 local surgeons to continue what they had started. They transformed that community. I felt privileged to watch them work and assist where I could to get patients moved quickly. Every Rotarian should experience this and be there when the children wake up and open their eyes, smile, and say thank you.

So we've seen some amazing projects this year and met some incredible people. We have also met with 35 heads of state. All of them want to work with Rotary and two asked for

written MOUs [memorandums of understanding] with us. This kind of respect around the world isn't due to me, or even the office of the president. It comes from you, your connections, your reputation in your home countries. That's what opens doors everywhere.

We also continue to develop new partnerships. I'm especially proud that we've joined forces with Toastmasters International to bring their expertise in public speaking and leadership development into the Rotary experience. I also want to thank Toastmasters President Lark Doley, who joined us this morning to celebrate the fellowship between our organizations. This partnership will start with making Rotary-branded leadership training materials available online for Rotaract clubs and then Rotary clubs.

I encourage all of you to think of a way that you can leave your mark on Rotary and the world. Think of what you have heard this week — and the people you've met eager to partner with you — and don't be afraid to dream big. Because big dreams are for everyone with the courage to lead.

Which brings me back to a certain flamingo. I'm sure many of you have heard me talk about this flamingo in the past year. It shared the front cover of *The Rotarian* magazine with me and my wife, Esther. At first, you might not see it. You see a flock of seven flamingos strutting past. But, if you look closely, you'll see that all of them are heading in the same direction except one.

And, for me, that one flamingo is a perfect symbol of how we need to change our thinking in Rotary. Change — not for its own sake, but careful, considered, goal-directed change — is essential for any organization that wants to evolve, stay relevant, and move forward in the right direction.

Let's be like that brave flamingo. Let's have the curiosity, the courage, and the conviction to look at different paths that might be better — whether you're out for a stroll on a beautiful Bahamas morning, or helping chart the course for our organization.

Thank you for the amazing support you have given to me and Esther this year, and thank you for your dedication to Rotary and for all you are doing to make the experience in our clubs exceptional, and for making the world a better place. I hope you have been inspired this year, and I ask you to continue to *Be the Inspiration* while you connect the world.