

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL – DISTRICT 2420

**District Conference 3- 6 June 2010
Antalya, Turkey**

Opening Address by Rotary International President's Representative

Ronald WG Lucas

District Governor Nuri, Past Officers of Rotary International, Distinguished Guests, Ladies, and my Rotary friends.

My first and pleasant duty is to bring Rotary greetings from the President of Rotary International John Kenny and his wife June. My wife Cynthia and I are delighted to be here in Antalya representing John and June at this splendid Conference and Venue. It also gives me the opportunity of meeting again PDGs Turgit Gökyigit, who was my fellow Governor in '95-'96, and Selkuk Somer with whom I have served on an RI Committee, and to visit Turkey for the first time.

A speaker was addressing a meeting of patients at a mental hospital, and he began by asking the rhetorical question "why are we all here?" to which someone at the back responded "because we are not all there!". So why are we all here to spend a weekend away from our homes and families in Istanbul? The answer is surely because we are committed Rotarians and spouses who wish to come together in fellowship and fun, to perhaps be inspired, and to return to our clubs with happy memories of time well spent, and with fresh enthusiasm and ideas of service. I have attended most of my own District Conferences in the last 30 years, and now I look back with fond remembrances of happy times of fellowship, and recall speakers who have given me much food for thought and inspiration. This is what we are about this weekend, here in Antalya.

Now a word or two about our RI President John Kenny. I have known John personally for over 20 years since before he became President of Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland (RIBI) in 1992-93. He is a man of great ability, as his profile shows, but at the same time he is a man of great humility and charm. He has served Rotary well in its many areas, and he richly deserves to be honoured with the Presidency in this year 2009-10. He and his wife June have no children, but I know he regards Rotarians – all 1.2 million of us around the world – as his family and I hate to think just how long his Christmas card list is – but there is always a personal word. On the death in 2003 of a much loved and respected Past 1992-93 District Governor from my District, John flew down from Scotland to give a personal tribute at his funeral in Shropshire. This is the man John Kenny who has been so ably supported by his lovely wife June, down the years.

In his opening address to the RI Assembly in San Diego 2009, President-elect John then said “we are here from all parts of the world to share knowledge and experience. We are here to be part of the tradition of Rotary leadership that has spanned so many generations — to bring new ideas and fresh enthusiasm, to build on the accomplishments of our predecessors, and to leave better districts and stronger clubs to those who will come after us. We are here because we believe the words of the poet Longfellow, who wrote: “We often judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing. Others judge us by what we have done.”

He also went on to say, “Rotarians are and must be people of a certain caliber, people with the capacity to do great deeds, the sense to do them wisely, and the strength of character to do them honestly and well”. He also said “everything we do, everything we achieve, begins in our clubs. Show me a good club president, and I will show you a good club”. It is District Conferences such as yours that clubs can be renewed and invigorated with fresh ideas of commitment and service.

Ninety-seven years ago our founder Paul Harris told those at the 1913 Rotary Convention in Buffalo, New York, “It is a far greater undertaking to be a good Rotarian today than it was yesterday; it will be a far greater undertaking tomorrow than it was today”. I hope by attending this weekend’s Conference your Rotary commitment and enthusiasm will be enhanced and your service will be inspired.

President John Kenny has asked that I highlight a number of things: -

- Supporting the efforts to end polio
- Highlight our programmes on water, health, hunger, literacy
- Emphasize the importance of Vocational Service, and
- To strengthen our membership, marking his Theme “The Future of Rotary is in your Hands”.

I clearly remember the start of Rotary’s “Polio Plus “programme 25 years ago. Rotary undertook to raise US\$120 million and raised \$247 million initially, now more than \$900 million. We stand alongside the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in this massive effort. It is the largest private sector effort on health issues in the history of mankind and we can be justly proud. But we still have some way to go to end polio forever, but we hope that one last push will see the eradication of the scourge of polio for all time. We cannot relax as the recent outbreak of wild poliovirus in Tajikistan illustrates and there Rotary is providing \$500,000 in emergency grants for immediate polio immunization efforts through the country. In addition to this vast contribution from Rotarians, over one million men and women of Rotary have volunteered their time and personal resources to help immunize more than 2 billion children in 122 countries of the world. I know many of you will have done your part by attending National Immunization Days (NIDs) in polio endemic countries.

We celebrate our enormous success in achieving a 99% polio-free world - Rotary's gift to the children of the world and I look back on one of my proudest moments in Rotary; on 18 January 1998, taking part in a National Immunisation Day in India when 136 million children were immunized in one day. My personal contribution was just 40 children, but my reassurance is that 12 years on those 40 children are growing up with strong limbs and straight backs. I remember a loving but poor mother handing me her baby, not yet six months old, so that I could give the child two drops of the precious vaccine. There was such trust and love in the eyes of the baby's mother that I shall never forget that moment. Furthermore, I was thrilled to enable the Rotarians of Faridabad, a large city south of Delhi, obtain an international sponsor with a club in my own District and with the help of a Matching Grant from the Rotary Foundation, provide desks, chairs, and a computer to help in a school they had built and run in the neighbourhood. Perhaps that small baby, now around 12 years old, is able to attend the Rotary School and obtain an education enabling her to grow and be fulfilled in life - another gift from Rotary. But there is no room for complacency "no one is safe until we are all safe". The Tajikistan outbreak highlights the fact that polio "control" is not an option, says Carol Pandak, manager of RI's Polio Plus Program, and only successful eradication will stop polio in resource-poor countries.

What of Water, Health, and Hunger? The provision of safe water and sanitation is not only a basic human need but also a truly great opportunity for Rotary service. Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General stated, "Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and therefore a basic human right." Despite this right, 1.2 billion people lack access to safe water, 2.6 billion lack access to basic sanitation. And when I say, "lack access to safe water," I mean there is no source of safe water within at least one kilometer of their home.

Those of you who have been to Africa particularly will have seen the consequences of this every day. The consequences are devastating. Women and young girls walk up to 9 kilometers every day to bring water to their families, sometimes making the trip several times a day. And very often this water is polluted and dirty, spreading disease to all who drink it. For children, the several hours spent every day in carrying water are exhausting. They have little energy left to go to school, where they might learn to read and acquire a basic education. Many of the adult women also spend much of their day in hauling water, time that could be much better used in teaching or growing crops or tending livestock or running a small enterprise where they sew garments, for example — in short, contributing to the economic well-being of their families and their communities.

We cannot do everything, but we can do something. Some 42 million people on earth are living with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS - the vast majority living in developing countries with limited medical facilities. One billion people do not have access to safe water and the grim consequence is that 6,000 children die every day because of impure drinking water and sanitation. And a staggering two billion people, that is nearly 1 out of 3 people, cannot read nor write.

3.

As I speak Rotarians in over 80 countries are implementing more than 2,000 safe water and sanitation projects ranging in value from a few thousand dollars to several hundred thousand all having the same purpose; reducing sickness and improving health. As with safe water so with safe sanitation. Imagine a life without a clean, private place to defecate and urinate, the embarrassment of going to the toilet in an abandoned plot or on the open street and, for women, the fear of assault at night. This is the reality for 2.6 billion people, mostly in Africa and India, who live in extreme poverty. In Ethiopia, for example, 95 percent of the rural population lacks safe sanitation. An open field, or open sewer, is the local toilet. It may sound gruesome, but it is the reality.

In Natal, South Africa, Rotarians from the local club helped the community install separate toilets for boys and girls at the secondary school. The girls now have privacy. They are comfortable attending school every day. Sanitation affects not only their health but their education and, in turn, literacy.

Most of these initiatives are driven by the vision and will of Rotarians working at the grassroots level with the community. They bring together all stakeholders. They assess the need — the causes of disease, sickness, death, disability. They choose the most appropriate solution, one within the capability of the community and compatible with local culture and customs. It must be easily operated and maintained, and the community must be able to pay for the service in the long term. In short, it must be truly sustainable.

We are privileged to be part of an organisation which is meeting human need with safe water, sanitation, health, and hunger, and we know that if their conditions are improving so there is time to spare to grow crops and to embark on life enhancing ventures.

What of literacy? How much do we take for granted our ability to read and write, to have a clear understanding of what is put in front of us? I have recently read Bernhard Schlink's book "The Reader" made into an Academy Award winning film with Kate Winslett, the British Actress in the lead role as Hanna who accepts a life sentence in prison for war crimes rather than admit she cannot read nor write. Such was her shame. And there are 800 million people on our planet who simply cannot read nor write. Two-thirds are women and three-quarters live in the developing world. Without the prospect of an education how can these people hope to lift themselves out of poverty?

Past RI President Glen Kinross has said, "Poverty is the root cause of so much disease in the world, poverty is the root cause of so much hunger in the world, poverty is the root cause of so much pollution in the world." Poverty, we know, also breeds crime, creates political unrest, and can even lead to terrorism. So, if Rotarians can help the people of the world to read and write, then they will be lifting folk from poverty and working towards world peace.

4.

Our RI Literacy Resource Group has done some outstanding work coordinating a huge range of literacy projects undertaken by clubs and districts. Of the first type of projects, concentrated language encounter, or CLE, which was devised by Rotarians in Australia, has been an outstanding way of teaching reading. Through Rotary Foundation 3-H Grants and Matching Grants, this method has been used widely in Thailand, Bangladesh, Philippines, Nepal, South Africa, Brazil, and many other countries, teaching thousands to read.

At the Convention in Salt Lake City, Rotarians learned of the young Turkish girl, born without arms, and sheltered at home by her parents until the age of 18 because of their concerns for her well-being. This girl, Ermine Yüzay, heard from her brothers and sisters about a free CLE course being sponsored by Rotarians. She joined the course and managed to read, turning the pages with her toes. She became so successful and changed by these new skills that she now teaches Turkish women to read and write using the CLE method. And, thanks to the magic that is Rotary, Emine now has prosthetic arms. Emine Yüzay, a literacy champion indeed. She may be known to some of you.

Let me relate some of my own experiences of a wonderful Rotary Literacy Project. In 2004, during our visit to District 9270, Natal, South Africa, we shared a little of the wonderful US\$300,000 Adult Literacy Programme started in 1998 by the Rotarians with the help of a Health, Hunger and Humanity Grant (3-H) from the Rotary Foundation and money raised by District 1040 in England. The project still continues and is helping to teach adult Africans to read, write and count for the first time, many of whom have been denied any real education and many of whom are in prison.

Cynthia and I visited evening classes in Pietermaritzburg and saw for ourselves what volunteer teachers, both black and white, were doing to give literacy to many disadvantaged in African society. Then we were told that since the programme began over 3,000 adults had learned to read, write, and count up to standard ratified by the local university, but each person had probably taught a further six members of their family so the effective result was that over 20,000 people had become literate so far from this ongoing 3-H project. One 70-year-old was asked why he wanted to learn to read at such an age and his reply was "So I can read my grandson a bedtime story". We cannot do everything, but we can do something. The genius of Rotary is that with the organisation we have, we can be sure our efforts are effective and productive, and a literacy project is something that each Rotary club can undertake.

As David Fowler, RI General Coordinator Literacy Resource Group 2006-08 has said "This then is our opportunity. For those of us who have been lucky enough to learn to read and to write, for those of us who have benefited from an education and have had the opportunity to avoid a life in poverty: We can all be literacy champions. Rotary can be the world's literacy champion. Let's do it!"

RI President John asks me to emphasize the importance of Vocational Service. Here are some words from Past RI President Robert Barth from Switzerland with reference to the Rotary pin. He said the pin should say this of the wearer -

You can rely on me
I am dependable
I am reliable
I give more than I take
I am available.

Past RI President Rajendra K. Saboo has said “Ethics is not outdated. Integrity and honesty have not been redefined.” Ethics is not confined to business or profession alone — it reflects in totality and moves in tandem with family values. The fruit never falls far from the tree, and your children will be what you are or what you do”. “Travelling through the Vocational Service Avenue is like a life journey. There are no shortcuts, nor is it a highway. It is a street that passes through towns, villages, communities where people meet people; where you will meet people, you will lift them up and, in turn, they will help you climb uphill to the top. This journey will shape your character, invoke the genius that inhabits you, and offer you opportunities to realize your full potential”. In my view, vocational service should have remained a committee in its own right and should not have been merged with Community Service, as it was some years ago. It defines us and is too precious to be watered down.

As Saboo said, “I can never repay Rotary. And on my last journey, my hands will not be empty — they will be filled by what Rotary has given me, thanks largely to vocational service”.

Finally, you do not need me to remind you of the importance of strengthening our membership of Rotary. The developed world is going through difficult times. However, I firmly believe that the quality of Rotary – its unique fellowship, its unique opportunity for service to others, all contribute to the magic of Rotary and that has its own appeal to potential members. With committed, dedicated, enthusiastic Rotarians, we have nothing to fear in the future.

Cynthia and I wish you every success in all your endeavours and I want to finish by sharing a poem by Iris Hesselden called SHARING LOVE

Have you a song within your heart,
 Have you a smile to share?
Have you a moment in the day
 To show someone you care?
Have you the time to be a friend
 And listen when they call?
Have you the courage every day
 To step out walking tall.

Have you a hope for all mankind
 Whatever faith or creed?
Have you the strength to show the way
 To those who are in need?
If you've a song, a smile a hope,
 A special dream or two,
You have discovered love my friend,
 And love discovered you!

My fellow Rotarians and friends, have a great District Conference, REMEMBER –
THE FUTURE OF ROTARY IS IN YOUR HANDS AND HAVE FUN.