



## RI PRESIDENT'S CLOSING REMARKS TO THE 2015 ROTARY CONVENTION

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*Ni hao!*

My friends in the family of Rotary:

It's been a fantastic four days in São Paulo, don't you agree? If you agree, let's do one more round of happy clap together.

Thanks to our hosts in São Paulo, our staff members in Evanston, and Rotary volunteers, this convention has been a big success.

I know you have taken lots of pictures and selfies. Right now, I ask everybody here to take your smartphones out one more time and snap another selfie, of you and the Rotarian friends who are sitting next to you. Text this token of fellowship to your Rotary clubs at home or share it on your Facebook, Twitter, or WeChat.

Confucius once said, 有朋自遠方來，不亦樂乎 — “To have friends come from afar is the most joyful thing.” I am sure you feel the same way today. For me, this closing ceremony marks the end of a leadership cycle and a memorable journey.

In the past year, I have traveled to many parts of the world to visit Rotary clubs and Rotary projects. Oftentimes, we started out in snowy Evanston on Monday, landed in the hot city of New Delhi on Wednesday, and ended up in chilly Copenhagen on Saturday.

At the beginning of our Rotary year, I used to be able to tell people every place I'd visited. Now, forget it. It's too much. I can't name the countries and places, but many of the warm memories and stories have stayed with me.

As president of Rotary, it is my job to listen to Rotarians. I try to encourage and inspire them wherever I meet them. Whether it's a successful project or a challenge to overcome, I want to hear what you are thinking, doing, and planning. Sometimes I have a suggestion or an idea for you; other times I am able to make a connection that will move a project forward. Often, I go back to Evanston with ideas that help guide us in our board decisions.

But what I value most are the conversations with Rotarians that, taken together, tell the story of Rotary. Some of their stories make me laugh. Others, which may sound simple and ordinary, deeply move me.

For example, last summer I visited Nigeria, which had been recently struck with political troubles and terrorist attacks. Rotary services are badly needed, and local Rotarians never gave up hope. One rainy day, I met a large group of Rotarians and city officials in a village. They arranged a ribbon-cutting ceremony for me to attend. I had no idea what it was for. I simply got my scissors and followed orders. Then, I quickly found out that local Rotary clubs had dug two water wells and built three new public toilets. There was nothing fancy about the toilets, just simple concrete facilities. But it was a big deal for the villagers. Clean water and sanitation play a key role in preventing the spread of disease.

I was very touched. Do you know why? In 1905, when Paul Harris founded Rotary, the first community service project his club did was to build Chicago's only public restroom, outside the City Hall. From the very beginning, Rotarians have been interested in meeting the real, practical needs of a community. Now, the same spirit is spreading to all parts of the world.

In India, 115 Rotary clubs in District 3230 started a Happy Village Project to help those without access to housing, clean drinking water, toilets, hospitals, and schools. Rotarians adopted more than 100 villages. When I met the villagers, they had smiles on their faces. They told me happy stories and showed me the new houses and village clinics they had built.

Each time I witness such projects, I always wonder: How many other lives could we change for the better by bringing more people into Rotary? Well, we all know great things don't happen by themselves. We have to constantly challenge ourselves and others, and push the boundaries. Sometimes, all it takes is to ask.

When I was visiting Zambia in early May, I met Her Excellency Inonge Wina, the new vice president, who is the highest-ranking female in the history of Zambia. I asked if she was willing to join Rotary and she said yes. I gave her my pin and she joined on the spot. Look how happy she is.

In 2001, I traveled to Mongolia with a group of Rotarians from Hong Kong and Macau to visit the first and only club in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Over dinner inside a yurt, I challenged the president-elect, who was a successful businesswoman, to charter a Mongolian-speaking club. On the spot, we donated money as her start-up fund, and invited her and other Rotarians to attend the 2002 Taipei Presidential Conference if she could make it happen. And she did it and exceeded our expectations. At the charter ceremony for the first Mongolian-speaking club, the club president made me their godfather. When I visited Ulaanbaatar again two weeks ago, I realized that I had become a grandfather, because the club I helped has sponsored a new club. It is exciting. There are now 14 Rotary clubs in Mongolia; 11 of them are Mongolian speaking and three English speaking.

In addition to asking, there are many other ways we can make Rotary strong. Over the past year, I have learned that the best is to start with our own families. Two years ago, my wife, Corinna, and I attended a new-club charter ceremony in Taiwan. When we got home, she suddenly said to me: "I think I'm going to become a Rotarian too!" I was a little surprised, because the idea of inviting her to Rotary had never occurred to me before. We had been married for 38 years, during which time she had attended thousands of Rotary activities. She gave polio drops to children in Africa and prepared food at homeless shelters. But she was always introduced as the Rotary spouse. I had never thought of making her a Rotarian. So, after she decided to join, I offered my full support. Guess what? Not only did she join the club, she also persuaded other spouses to do the same. Now, her Rotary club has 106 members, and it's the second-largest club in Taipei.

In her pre-Rotary days, Corinna was shy, and always turned down requests to speak at Rotary events. But now, when you give her a microphone, she speaks more confidently to her fellow Rotarians about her ideas and suggestions. In fact, each time I finish a speech, she always criticizes me for missing this or not emphasizing that.

Inviting our spouses into Rotary isn't just about getting our numbers up. It addresses the reality that Rotary still has far more men as members than it does women. That is something we need to work on. In China, there is a popular saying: Women can hold up half the sky. This is certainly true in my own family. I was raised in a big family, with six strong women — my mother, who is now 96 years old, and my five sisters. I can tell you that they hold more than half the sky. Many Rotarians who are here today will agree with me.

My wife's story got me thinking about forming a Rotary family. In the following six months, I began working on my two daughters, my son, my daughter-in-law, and my son-in-law. Now, all of them are proud Rotarians. Our annual Chinese New Year dinner is like a Rotary club meeting. Rotary is the common language that binds different generations in my family together.

I hope you will do the same and continue to make our own Rotary family a priority. Being the RI president is a big milestone in my life. At this moment, I think of my life 50 years ago, when I won a prize from the local Rotary club for outstanding service at my high school. The Rotary award lunch was an eye-opening experience.

It was the first time in my life I used a fork and knife for my meal. More important, I noticed that Rotarians sitting around me were all the smart and successful business and community leaders I had seen on TV or read about in the newspapers. In those days, only a few people in Taiwan could speak English, but all the Rotarians could speak it very well. As you can see, I was very impressed and motivated. During that lunch, I made up my mind to be like them — be successful in my career and join Rotary.

After I received my business degree in the U.S., I became a businessman in Taiwan. One day, a client of mine, who was a controller for a multinational company, invited me to a lunch meeting. When I arrived, I realized that it was a Rotary club meeting. Actually, it was the same club, the Rotary Club of Taipei, that had given me the prize 10 years before. All the leaders I had admired were still there.

By then, I felt the call to become a part of Rotary. So I went back again and again. But when I applied for membership, I was rejected three times within nine months. The reason was because I was too young, there was no open classification, and I wasn't a top executive. I was not discouraged. I continued to participate in their club events. Gradually, they gave in and opened the door. Thus, in 1976, I became the youngest member of the Rotary Club of Taipei. Who would have thought this guy here would become the first Chinese to lead Rotary International 38 years later.

Rotary has shaped and changed my life. I want to use my story to urge Rotarians to continue to welcome promising young people in your communities and to take care of those who need a little push from us. Someday, those we have helped might become a future president of Rotary International, or a successful businessperson, a mayor, or the president of a country. Within Rotary, anything is possible.

As we are saying goodbye to our old and new Rotary friends, I want to give my thanks to Rotary founder Paul Harris, who said, "Rotary brings men differing in social status, religious beliefs, and nationality together in order that they may be more intelligible to each other and therefore more sympathetic and friendly."

Paul Harris taught us that diversity is not a handicap. It is power. A ray of light consists of different colors, from violet to red. These colors can be added on to each other to make another color. What happens when you keep adding colors? You get very bright white! Rotarians have come together with diverse and sometimes different views on issues. Through fellowship and volunteer projects, we learn to get along better with each other and concentrate more on the things we have in common than on the things that drive us apart. When we work hard to *Light Up Rotary* in our own color, small bits of colored lights have joined up to become a unified glow that makes this world shine brightly. The light you have planted in the heart of others will grow, and soon they will be able to shine light on others. All together, we can light up the world.

Fellow Rotarians, it has been a great honor for me to serve as your president this year. As we move forward, I urge you to continue to *Light Up Rotary* and *Be a Gift to the World!*

Thank you. *Xi xie. Obrigado.*