



RI PRESIDENT'S SPEECH TO THE 2015 ROTARY CONVENTION

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Friends in Rotary:

Ni hao and boa tarde!

I'm very happy to welcome you all to the Rotary International Convention in this beautiful city of São Paulo. I want to thank members of our host committee and the Rotarians in Brazil for their hard work and warm hospitality.

The timing of our convention couldn't have been better. We are walking right into São Paulo's June festivals. Our host city has planned a series of activities to celebrate the lives of Christian saints and the arrival of winter. We have added one more celebration to the calendar, because our convention is the largest festival in the world of Rotary.

Our Rotary convention is a festival of ideas. It provides the stage to showcase our achievements and inspire each other with stories and new ideas.

Equally important, the convention is a festival of fellowship. Rotary brings together people from all corners of the world in harmony and friendship. We celebrate our diversity and our shared vision for service. Rotary founder Paul Harris once said: "Friendship was the foundation rock on which Rotary was built. Tolerance is the element which holds it together." If Paul Harris is looking down upon us at this very moment, he will be smiling.

On a personal level, this convention is the highlight of my year as the Rotary International president. As we're coming to the end of a productive Rotary year, allow me to give you a quick report on our good work and share some of my observations.

Over the past year, Rotary clubs around the globe have engaged in tireless efforts to bring capable leaders into our organization. Their hard work has paid off. As of the end of May, 30 zones have increased their membership in the past 11 months. This Rotary year there has been a 47,884 net membership increase, which is a 4 percent increase in membership, and the best in the last 14 years.

For our new members, welcome to the Rotary family. You've made a wise choice.

Up to now, we have more than 50 new Arch Klumph Society members. These Rotarians have each given at least \$250,000 to The Rotary Foundation. At the end of May, total contributions reached more than \$220 million, which is \$12 million more than last year. Their donations will enable Rotary to light up the world

through a wide range of local and international projects — mentoring children in Russia, digging a water well for villagers in Africa, joining a rescue team to help people affected by Typhoon Haiyan and the big earthquake in Nepal, and supporting treatments of patients during the Ebola crisis.

Behind the above figures are many inspiring stories of individual Rotarians who are helping in their own unique ways to make our organization strong and to increase our impact on the community. Let me tell you a story about a Rotary couple in Taiwan.

The lady's name is Judy and her husband is Jeff Chang. They are partners in life and partners in business. Both have been active in the same Rotary club for many years.

Last summer when Taiwan launched a *Light Up Rotary* membership campaign, Judy and Jeff engaged in a friendly competition. They each began reaching out to their circles of friends and contacts. With the support of their district governor and other Rotary clubs, Jeff and Judy were able to form two new clubs within *three* months.

Last Christmas Eve, when I was in Taipei, I attended the joint charter ceremony of the Rotary Club of Elegance and the Rotary Club of Harmony New Taipei City. Each club has more than 60 members. The story did not end there. Both charter presidents Judy and Jeff have become Arch Klumph Society members. In this husband and wife competition, they are both winners.

So is Rotary.

Another remarkable example is the governor of District 9212, Bimal Kantaria. When I visited Kenya in early May, he shared some exciting news with me. District 9212 has added 24 new clubs with more than 800 members this Rotary year. In addition, for the first time in Rotary's history, four generous Rotarians from Kenya have become members of the Arch Klumph Society.

Throughout our organization, there are many dedicated and generous Rotarians like Jeff and Judy and Rotary leaders like District Governor Bimal and District Governor Shimuta [Hiroshi Shimuta, District 4420], who are passionate about our causes. During a recent trip, a Rotarian asked me if I had one wish for all of Rotary, what would it be? It was an interesting question! I never thought about it before. I could have asked that everyone invite one new member or make a donation to our Foundation. But then I realized what would be the best wish: I want every Rotarian to see what I have seen. In Chinese we say, 百闻不如一见, which means "Hearing a hundred times is not as good as seeing once."

If you go to Myanmar, you'll see people go into a dirty stream with containers, and take the water from there and get sick. Now, because of Rotary, many of them have clean water to drink.

If you go to Thailand, you see kids who never went to the dentist. Now, because of Rotary, they have dental care and they will not lose their teeth.

Even in rich countries, like the U.S., you can see families who do not have enough to eat. Now, because of Rotary, they can get food from food banks to feed their children.

Because if every Rotarian could see all of this work, see the way that Rotary is changing lives, I know that we would not have any more membership problems in Rotary!

And if every Rotarian could see all of the work that is being supported by our Rotary Foundation, I think we would never have to ask again for donations to our Foundation. They would come, whether we asked or not.

The Rotary Club of San Diego in the U.S. has a wonderful slogan, which I think captures the true power and spirit of Rotary today. It is called We Are Everywhere.

With Rotary clubs in 206 countries and regions, we cover more than the United Nations. We are still chartering new territories. We have set our eyes on China, Vietnam, and Laos, where we see great potential for our services. Two weeks ago, I went to China to witness the chartering of five new Rotary clubs, including the first Chinese-speaking club, the Rotary Club of Shanghai West. They have fulfilled a wish of Rotarians who tried to charter a Chinese-speaking club in Shanghai 80 years ago.

At this moment, there are more than 300 Rotarians representing 23 countries in China. They have expanded from Beijing and Shanghai to more cities. Now, there are seven Rotary clubs, eight Interact clubs, and four Rotaract clubs. Those young people, our future Rotarians, are very active there. I want to thank the Board of Directors for approving the charter of 10 new expatriate Rotary clubs last September. I am sure the extension will pave the way for our future in China.

Just this past Tuesday night when I arrived here in São Paulo, I chartered the Rotary Club of São Paulo-Brasil-Taiwan, a Chinese-speaking club.

We have done a successful job expanding our clubs in new territories.

Membership growth is also crucial to our future growth.

When I took office last year, I urged Rotarians to reach out to your communities by hosting a Rotary Day event. You have taken action. Rotary clubs around the globe have organized thousands of Rotary Day celebrations. Some were simple activities like a summer picnic, a chili cooking contest, a bike race, or a weekend gathering at a community center or a school. Others were a little more fancy— a dragon-boat race, a bazaar, and a marathon — all of which were attended by several hundred or thousand people. Rotary Day events have proven to be effective membership tools. In Turkey, Rotarians celebrated their Rotary Day by organizing a bazaar and a wheelchair race. They invited the newly elected mayor of Istanbul. In his speech, he mentioned how he loves Rotary because he used to be a Rotaractor. So I said, “Why are you not a Rotarian?” He answered, “No one ever asked me!” I said, “I’m asking you now!” So I gave him my pin. That evening he wore a formal suit and came to my farewell party with his own photographer.

“Mr. President, could you pin me again? I want to let people know that I’m a proud Rotarian.” The same thing happened again and again at other Rotary Day events. We recruited the mayor of Lusaka, Zambia; the first female vice president of Zambia; the minister of health in Rome; the first female vice chancellor at Uppsala University, Sweden, and the mothers of district governors in Sri Lanka and the U.S.

Aside from attracting new members, Rotary Day events were also fun. I participated in hundreds of celebrations in the past year, and saw the same thing wherever I went — people with big, big smiles! Rotarians are proud of Rotary and local residents are proud of their communities.

The most impressive Rotary Day that I attended was in Chennai, India, last December. Rotary District 3230 organized a My Flag, My India campaign, which enabled them to enter the Guinness Book of World Records. They registered more than 50,000 college and high school students, corporate and government employees, Rotarians, Rotaractors, Interactors, and other community members. Participants stood together, each one holding a sign in different colors to make the formation of the Indian flag. Under the flag were the words Keep India Polio Free. They have every reason to celebrate, because there have been

no cases of polio in India for four years. There might still be hundreds of thousands of people in India who have gotten polio. But not one of them is under the age of four.

Speaking of polio, we have made great progress in our final push for polio eradication, but the situation in the remaining three countries is challenging. I recently wrote to Afghanistan's new president, Ashraf Ghani, to congratulate him on his new role and seek his support for polio eradication in his country. We received a response from the president in four days! He has promised to put his full government resources behind the effort. We have received similar commitments from the governments in Pakistan and Nigeria. The good news is, as of today, there have been no cases of polio, at all, in all of Africa, for 10 months.

The last case was in Nigeria, at the end of July. If we keep going like this, soon we will be able to celebrate not just a polio-free South-East Asia, but also a polio-free Africa. And I hope and believe that we will achieve a polio-free world, on schedule, in 2018. When that happens, we have to host a *worldwide* Rotary Day celebration. No human flag is big enough to say thank you, to all of you.

There is one Confucian saying that has guided me and motivated me for many years. He said, "It is better to light a single candle than to sit and curse the darkness." To me, this saying carried three layers of meaning: First, he advised us to be selfless like a candle, which burns itself to bring light and joy to others. As a Rotarian, we devote our time and energy to our communities. We sacrifice ourselves to improve the lives of others. Second, we need to face life's challenges with courage. Instead of cursing and complaining about world problems, we take action and make small changes one at a time. Third, the light of a single candle may be feeble. But if all of our Rotarians and friends can join, our communities will be much brighter. Nothing we do is ever small. It all adds up. Every candle you light makes a difference. Let's work hard to *Light Up Rotary* and together, we can light up the world.

Once again, thanks for coming to São Paulo. See you all at tonight's Rotary Carnival.

Let the party begin.