



TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

## Challenge and opportunity

**One year ago this month**, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. As I write these words, the coronavirus continues to wreak havoc: taking lives, choking economies, and changing our societies in myriad ways. It has disproportionately hurt the poor and worsened inequalities.

Even as some countries have done better than others in controlling this deadly disease, the rapid development of vaccines is bringing us closer to the end of our strange new reality of social isolation.

This dark chapter in our history is also an opportunity for Rotary, because it reminds us of the impact we can have through The Rotary Foundation if we commit to helping others and live up to our highest ideals. It reminds us of the truly international spirit that we must embody to recover from this moment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed compassion and sacrifice, friendship and resilient good humor. I am reminded of that famous insight popularized by John F. Kennedy: “When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters: One represents danger, and one represents opportunity.”

Working together, we have done so much to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, to care for our communities, and to seize the opportunity to be a part of perhaps the most complex task ever undertaken in history — vaccinating 7 billion people.

This does not mean we will deviate in any way

from our avowed commitment to eradicating polio, which remains our highest priority and will continue to be our only corporate program.

On the contrary, while continuing polio vaccinations and surveillance, we can apply all our experience in fighting polio to counter COVID-19. We all have a part to play in combating the growing force of vaccine resistance and misinformation. Our advocacy in our communities will be critical — we need to spread the message about the power of vaccines to save lives. We need to work closely with governments and support them in the vaccination drive. We need to add to the more than 3,000 projects already registered on Rotary Showcase to raise awareness, deliver critical personal protective equipment, and support frontline health workers.

As Aristotle said, human beings are social animals, and while COVID-19 has cruelly deprived us of our natural or habitual environment, it does not prevent us from finding connections and helping others in new ways. As you will see in the coming months, Rotary members are already finding the means to channel their humanitarian spirit through the Foundation, which is constantly adapting to address the world's challenges. Every Rotarian has a role in this effort, and you will find that however you choose to help others and make lasting change, you are not alone.

**K.R. RAVINDRAN**

*Foundation trustee chair*

*Illustration by Luke Wilson*