



PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Shekhar Mehta

Rotary International President

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Greetings, my movers and shakers of Rotary. You are the movers, and I am Shekhar.

Last year at our International Assembly, I called the class of new governors-elect the change-makers. And I want you to know that I see you that way, too. It doesn't matter when your year of leadership begins or ends, you are already important leaders in our organization, capable of bringing about great change. And I see you as being just as important for the rest of my Rotary year as Rotary president as you will be for President-elect Jennifer [Jones] and all the presidents to follow.

And I am so pleased that President-elect Jennifer has called on you to dream big and think of ways that Rotary can touch the imagination of the whole world. I wholeheartedly agree. I take great inspiration from the words of George Bernard Shaw, who said, "You see things; and you say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?'"

My dream in Rotary is to grow more and do more. One of the most important ways that we are doing more is focusing on empowering girls. The pandemic has been difficult on everyone around the world, but especially on young girls. Studies released by UN agencies show that girls have suffered most of all from the pandemic. They have suffered in schools, been forced to leave school more often, and have suffered more terrible consequences like human trafficking than ever before.

I am overjoyed that President-elect Jennifer has decided to continue this focus for another year and to continue to encourage clubs to start projects in their own communities and to support efforts worldwide that help improve the education, health care, and economic opportunities for girls. All of these projects fit very well within our existing areas of focus, and by making an impact on girls at this very critical moment, we will send a message to the world that Rotary cares, and Rotary can make a big impact on our future.

We are shining a bright light on all of our areas of focus this year, and the presidential conferences worldwide are demonstrating not only the great work Rotary is doing, but how these areas of focus work together to achieve important goals. For example, we had a wonderful presidential conference in the Philippines — which was one of the best-attended Rotary events in the Asia-Pacific in recent years — that showed how our new area of focus on the environment can help build and protect local economies, many of which depend on industries like fishing and coastal farming for their livelihood.

These presidential conferences will culminate in Houston in June with a special pre-convention conference on peace. Everything we do in Rotary helps build Positive Peace in the world. If we want to create a future for our children and grandchildren with

less conflict and less risk of catastrophic wars, we must do all we can to alleviate poverty and build hope. During my latest meetings with heads of state in different parts of the world, I was privileged to convey the message of Positive Peace through Rotary service in these countries. We will build hospitals, enhance health care, empower through education, and provide hope. Rotary service creates hope. It changes lives. And everything we do ends up creating another opportunity for peace to emerge in our world.

Members of Rotary bring Positive Peace into the lives of people when we bring water to the thirsty, food to the hungry, knowledge to the illiterate. I love what John Lennon wrote in his song “Imagine”:

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace ...

At Rotary, service and peace is a way of life.

President-nominee Gordon [McInally] believes strongly in using our areas of focus to build Positive Peace and to inspire hope — and I am very pleased that we will continue to inspire the Rotary world along this path as well.

So those are some of the ways that Rotary can continue to do more in the years ahead. But to make our greatest impact, Rotary must also grow more.

In my travels, I have been so inspired by the enthusiasm that our Grow Rotary efforts have created across the world. The work that you do to help grow Rotary will inspire a new generation of Rotary service. Increasing our membership gives people from all walks of life the opportunity to share their knowledge and skills in transformational service. As members in every club do this, they will become change-makers, as they will change the lives — for good — of each person they make a member of Rotary.

There has never been a more exciting time to rise to the challenge of Rotary leadership. We are making great progress in our efforts to End Polio Now. You can pull us across the finish line by inspiring your clubs to keep donating to our efforts. These investments are just as important now as ever before. And as we have seen during the pandemic, we continue to build health care infrastructure worldwide that is helping to increase vaccination rates and expand health care services in a way that will help bring this pandemic to an end and prevent future pandemics.

The world needs Rotary like never before. It needs us to be bold, to be inspirational, to be generous of our time and resources. It needs us to be bigger, and it needs us to be better known. As we achieve big goals, we need to think of new ones that capture the public spirit. We need the world to know that we are the people who bring hope and make dreams possible.

My friends, thank you for taking up this challenge and for doing your part to achieve great things. We will continue to *Serve to Change Lives*. We will bring hope to the world when we *Imagine Rotary*.