



RI PRESIDENT'S OPENING REMARKS

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My Rotary friends, my Rotary family from across the globe — it's always a joy to be with you, whether we are connecting online, having lunch together in our clubs, or collaborating on a service project. But most of all, it is always a joy to come together at an international convention, renewing important friendships and greeting each other with wide eyes, with open hearts — and with big Rotary hugs!

Every Rotary convention is about you: the people who love this organization so much that you take the time to be together, learn from each other, and experience something unforgettable.

That's why, when it came time to plan a convention around you, I wanted us to have an opening session that felt like a celebration. I hope you take that spirit away from this room and share it across Singapore this week. I believe we can all do with an injection of hope and enthusiasm right now, especially with so many dark skies around us.

And before I begin, I want to give a special thanks to the district governors this year who have been just wonderful partners in our efforts to *Create Hope in the World*. Could all of the 2023-24 district governors in attendance please rise?

Please recognize the hope-creating governors.

Thank you for your service, one and all. And thank you for leading us in these challenging times.

As all of us know, peace has been on the minds of the world this past year — and remains on the forefront of Rotary's mission. It was a thrill to be joined by Graça Machel today and to hear her inspiring stories about building peace in the world.

Her optimism in these difficult times was important for all of us to hear. It brought to mind for me the timeless words of our beloved Scottish poet, Robert Burns, who wrote, "For a' that an' a' that, / It's coming yet for a' that, / That man to man, the world o'er, / Shall brothers be for a' that."

These words speak of our common humanity and our shared desire to build a more peaceful and compassionate world, especially in the times of greatest peril. World peace is a perilous, difficult journey, and we are experiencing some trying moments right now.

The troubles of the world affect us deeply, because we have friends, and sometimes family and neighbors, experiencing the heartbreak of destruction and loss. But we are an

example of what a better world could be — one where people find common ground across their divides, and common purpose in elevating humanity.

Through our service projects, our humanitarian efforts, and our systematic approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, we can be catalysts for positive change in the world.

Peacebuilding isn't about stopping wars. I'm sure all of us would love to have the power to march into the war zones of the world and say "Stop this war!"

Sadly, we don't have that power. But I do believe however that we have the power to stop wars and conflicts from starting, through building peace from the ground level up: by preventing and treating disease; by improving water, sanitation, and hygiene; by improving maternal and child health; and by basic education and literacy; by community economic development; along with sustaining our environment.

We are so fortunate to have a strategic partnership with the highly respected Institute for Economics and Peace to help us in our mission to create a more peaceful world. I encourage you to look into how this can help you on your personal journey toward Positive Peace.

When we talk about these high-level ways of building peace, it's also important to drill down to the individuals whose lives we improve and for whom we create a more peaceful and hopeful future. I have been so fortunate to meet hundreds, maybe thousands of such individuals over the past year. But let me introduce just three of them to you at this stage.

We'll start with Kevin. Kevin is 16 and lives in Buenos Aires, and we met him last November during a visit to Argentina. Kevin can neither hear nor speak and is being educated at the Escuela Diana, a school which for many years has been funded by Rotary.

Through his sign language interpreter, Kevin told us that he hoped to graduate from school this summer and go on to college to become a mechanic. His teachers confirmed this was very likely to happen, and so Kevin, thanks to Rotary, thanks to each of you, will have the chance of a more hopeful and peaceful future.

The second of the three individuals I would like to introduce to you is Daphne. Daphne is 16 and lives in Zimbabwe, but we met Daphne in Chandigarh, India, in January, when we visited the Fortis Hospital, which for many years has been the location of a project spearheaded by the Rotary Club of Chandigarh, providing lifesaving surgeries to young people suffering from congenital heart defects.

Daphne had her surgery the day after we met her and has now returned home to Zimbabwe to live a normal happy and achieving life.

Daphne was the 777th patient to benefit from that program.

The 777th patient whose life has been saved.

The 777th patient who, thanks to Rotary, thanks to each of you, will have the chance of a more hopeful and peaceful future.

The third and final individual I would like to introduce to you is Precious. Precious is one year old and lives in Lilongwe in Malawi, and in March, I met her and her mother at a Rotary Family Health Day facilitated by the amazing Rotary Action Group for Family Health and AIDS Prevention.

I had the privilege of vaccinating Precious against polio.

And in my mind's eye I can still see those two precious drops falling into her mouth. I can also see the look of sheer gratitude in Precious' mother's eyes as she realized that her daughter would be spared the risk of contracting that crippling disease. Yet another example of where Rotary — where you — give individuals the chance of a more hopeful and peaceful future.

Our commitment to peace, and to the individuals we serve, places a priority on equipping ourselves, our communities, and change-makers with the tools to address these issues, while treating each other with decency and honoring our shared humanity.

Likewise, we won't improve mental health and well-being by ending all human sorrow, pain, or loneliness. Challenges are an inevitable part of life. But we can fight the stigma against reaching out for help.

We can make a difference for the people we serve by investing in the tools, people, institutions, and systems that will ensure access to quality, affordable care.

And we can do so much more for each other, by making our clubs warm, welcoming environments, where we care for and actively listen to one another and ensure that every member feels like they belong.

Over the last 12 months, Rotary has begun work to erase the stigma associated with discussions of emotional well-being, raise awareness of mental health needs, and improve access to mental health services. We have made significant progress over the past year, but there is still much more to be done.

Tomorrow's session will highlight some of the incredible projects underway in the Rotary world, showcasing the innovative ways in which we are addressing the mental health needs of communities and setting a standard for future projects across all of our areas of focus.

But let us also remember that this work cannot be completed in a mere 12 months, or even one year more. It will require us to make a long-term commitment, not just to treat the symptoms of poor mental well-being, but to address the underlying systemic issues that perpetuate stigma and prevent people from accessing the care and support they need.

As you already probably know, this issue is deeply personal for me. A little over 10 years ago, my brother Ian lost a long-term struggle with depression that he silently battled alone. His torment with this terrible disease consumed him — and ultimately took his life. And for me and others who loved him, his loss left us asking why. What did we miss?

What more could we have done?

I shared Ian's story not to gain your sympathy but to share my experience: that struggles with mental health can affect anyone, including a beloved younger brother, with a fine career and a loving, deeply caring family.

I have been so moved over the past year and a half by everyone in the Rotary world who has shared similar experiences within their own family.

My friends, mental health is a personal and family struggle for so many in this world. But it is also something more. It is a global challenge that affects everything we do.

It knows no boundaries of age, gender, race, or nationality.

And yet, for far too long, even discussing it has led to stigma, shame, and silence.

But in Rotary, we will not look the other way. You cannot show care and compassion with silence and excuses. We show it when we stand up, speak out, and take action.

And this is just what we've done.

From a village in the Philippines that recently opened a new health and wellness clinic for mothers after their community members took the brave leap to come together and start an informal network of peer-to-peer support groups, to clubs in Colorado in the U.S. building an endowment fund to ensure mental health professionals receive the right education to serve youth across the state, to clubs across the world taking the time to show care and compassion to one another.

Rotary members around the world have risen to this challenge.

So let us embrace this opportunity with gratitude, with enthusiasm, and with a renewed sense of purpose. Let us celebrate the incredible work that we have accomplished together, and let us look forward to the countless possibilities that lie ahead.

Thank you, my friends, for your unwavering dedication, your boundless generosity, and your tireless commitment to the ideals of Rotary.

May this international convention be a time of inspiration, of connection, and of transformation.

And may we leave here more determined than ever to be the change that we wish to see in the world.