

Jonathan Majiyagbe
President
Rotary International
UN Day
New York, NY
4 October 2003
Draft: 18 September 2003

My fellow Rotarians and all of the members of the Rotary Family:

Today, we have gathered to discuss the Fourth point of the Object of Rotary: “The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service.”

In other words – we are here to discuss how we can work for peace in our troubled world.

It is wonderful to see so many of you here today for Rotary International Day at The United Nations – which is always a joyful occasion as we celebrate Rotary's fulfilling relationship with the United Nations. It is also a day of great hope and great ambition – as we work on new ways for Rotary to ***Lend a Hand*** in partnership with the various agencies of the UN. Together, we have many helping hands – hands directly engaged in the work that must be done to build a more peaceful world.

Throughout the course of the day, I think we will come to a richer understanding that a more tolerant world has been a goal of Rotarians since the earliest days of our organization. Everything we do – improving our communities, promoting international fellowship, carrying

out humanitarian service – supports a world of peace and tolerance.

The connection between humanitarian service and peace is especially important to consider. Hunger, poverty and ignorance breed despair, anger and fear – the very same emotions that fan the flames of intolerance, conflict and even war. And those who suffer the miseries of abject poverty, cut off from hope for a decent future – these are the people who are most vulnerable to the rhetoric of war.

Throughout human history, contentious rhetoric has made the same evil arguments: there is not enough to go around, so we must fight for our share. Love is dead, so

we must hate to survive. Human lives are worth so little that squandering lives is of no consequence.

As Rotarians we refute these arguments with all of the resources we can muster. And as Rotarians, we are most fortunate to have excellent resources available to us. We have a worldwide fellowship of clubs in communities all over the world, and we have the programs of Rotary International and The Rotary Foundation – Group Study Exchange, Ambassadorial Scholarships, Matching Grants, Rotary Friendship Exchange, World Community Service, Youth Exchange, the centennial Twin Clubs program, Inter-Country Committees and – of course – the Rotary Centers for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution.

Whether the primary aim is educational exchange or humanitarian service – all of our programs promote world peace and tolerance. They give Rotarians – and non-Rotarians – opportunities to experience a culture different from their own and to act as goodwill ambassadors on behalf of their own country. Through these programs and in other ways, Rotarians have found other ways to support world peace and understanding.

In 1945, 49 Rotarians went to the United Nations Charter conference in San Francisco. By helping to draft the UN Charter, Rotary became a part of history and Rotary's close relationship with the UN continues to this day – not only through PolioPlus, but through other partnerships with various UN agencies. Rotary International also appoints representatives to UNESCO,

the UN Environment Program, the UN Center for Human Settlement and other UN agencies.

In 1981 – the Rotary Award for World Understanding and Peace was established to honor outstanding achievements consistent with the ideals and objectives of Rotary International. Each year, one individual or organization receives the award, which includes a US\$100,000 grant to a charitable organization of the recipient's choice. Past recipients include Pope John Paul II, Dr. Albert Sabin, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Nelson Mandela.

And in 2002, the seven Rotary Centers for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution accepted their first classes of Rotary Peace Scholars. For

decades, Rotarians had dreamed of creating a Rotary-sponsored academic program to promote world peace, goodwill and understanding. These seventy scholars were selected to pursue two-year masters degrees in international relations, peace studies and conflict resolution at The Rotary Peace Centers, which are located at prestigious universities around the world.

The program is now in its second year, and a second class of seventy scholars has been selected from a pool of candidates representing 40 countries. These outstanding individuals include Mai Hosoi of Japan, sponsored by District 2680. I think it is interesting to note that Mai began her professional career working as an intern for the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees in Tokyo. In

that job, Mai researched court decisions regarding refugees and interviewed asylum seekers. After Mai completes her studies at the Rotary Peace Center at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the United States, she intends to continue to work on behalf of refugees.

The Rotary Peace Centers represent just one part of our commitment to peace. And the world needs Rotary's commitment to peace – perhaps now more than ever. Global tensions are high and conflicts have broken out everywhere. We have a surplus of hate and a shortage of tolerance. For many of us, it is hard to open a newspaper without becoming quickly overwhelmed.

But by working together, we can encourage each other and remain hopeful about the future. I offer to you the words of a brave man who changed history, dedicating his life to nonviolent conflict resolution: Mahatma Ghandi. He said: "History is a record of perpetual wars, but we are now trying to make new history."

Rotarians have already written several chapters of that new history. It is a history of men and women of all races, religions, nationalities and political creeds who have made significant contributions to creating a more peaceful world. And I do believe that with even greater

collaboration between Rotary and the United Nations – we will continue to make new history.

As evidence that we are capable of making new history, we need look no further than PolioPlus. Rotary and UNICEF – along with the World Health Organization and the CDC – have brought about a 99 percent reduction in polio cases worldwide. We have wiped out polio on entire continents.

This is indeed a remarkable chapter in human history – and not just because of impressive statistics. In more than twenty years of polio eradication efforts, we have made several advances that can be applied to future health concerns. This is the “plus” in PolioPlus. We have

created the tools and the strategies to get vaccine to children in isolated regions. We have formed public-private partnerships to support and expand the health programs of national governments. We have bolstered the worldwide laboratory network, a network that will support disease surveillance efforts in the future.

And, perhaps most importantly, we have inspired warring nations to lay down their arms so that their children can be immunized.

All of this has raised the hopes of the entire world. We have gone into the most deprived and difficult regions in our world to immunize children. And in so doing, we lifted the burden of fear from their parents, improved the

health of families and sent a powerful message to entire communities – a message that yes – people do care.

People do care and are willing to ***Lend a Hand*** – contributing time and money and resources to do what is right.

We are all very much aware of the fact that we have not yet eradicated polio – and later this morning we will hear more details about what lies ahead in this last lap of the PolioPlus race. And as we focus our efforts to finish the job, I will remind you of this: it is no coincidence that the polio virus is making its last stand in the some of the poorest regions of the world. This is a vivid reminder that the problems of poverty, illiteracy, hunger, and poor health are almost always linked together – and to fight these problems we must make long-term commitments.

And whether we ***Lend a Hand*** to those in our own communities, or reach halfway around the world, personal contact and hands-on involvement have always been fundamental to our efforts. To ***Lend a Hand*** is to celebrate our shared humanity.

And when each of us is ready and willing to help our brothers and sisters in need, one hand can become many and there is no limit to what the helping hands of Rotary can accomplish.

Thank you.