



RI PRESIDENT-ELECT'S REMARKS

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My dear friends and family of Rotary, it is my privilege to introduce you to my family:

- My wife, Precy Babalola, a lawyer and an accomplished Rotarian
- My mother, Rianat Ikeola Babalola, who immunized 108 children on World Polio Day two years ago
- My daughter, Aminat Oluwabunmi Babalola, a past Rotaract club president
- My daughter, Atinuke Zainab Babalola, who joined Rotaract at university and later Rotary in Winnipeg
- My son, Malik Olalekan Babalola, who completed a degree in international relations from the University of Benin
- My sister, Ganiyat Mojisola Tijani, who became a Rotaractor in 1998 and is now a Rotarian and past club president
- My sister-in-law, Gloria Ada Wopara-Ordu, a teacher with a degree in food science and technology
- And Bryn's partner, Randy! Bryn, she's not just your Randy anymore. She's our Randy.

Please give my family a warm Rotary welcome!

My family has not only supported my Rotary journey. They *are* my Rotary journey. When I first met Precy, I saw her across a room at a Rotary event in Port Harcourt, leaned over to a friend, and said quietly, "That's the one." Since then, our whole family has chosen service as a way of life.

And as I honor my family, I want to honor someone whose presence is with us here despite their absence, my dear friend and brother, SangKoo Yun.

SangKoo once said, "I do not see myself as a lone leader, but as one link in a strong, unbroken chain." He was and remains a strong link in that chain, a chain of Rotary members who gave more, reached further, and served with greater purpose, generation after generation.

Like SangKoo — like all of us, really — Rotary has changed me deeply. I have been part of the Rotary family for more than 40 years. And I can tell you exactly when Rotary changed me.

My club took on a literacy project when I was a young Rotaractor. We were helping adults in my community learn to read and write. During that project, I watched a woman hold a piece of paper and read her own name for the first time.

That moment redirected me. I was not simply a young man with opportunities anymore. I was a young man with a responsibility to extend those opportunities to others.

Every Rotary member has a story like that, a moment when fellowship and service stopped being what you did and became who you are. I want us to tell more stories about how Rotary has changed each and every one of us. Because when we do, we show the world that Rotary is more than a service organization. It is a transformative experience.

That transformation is at the heart of our call to action this year to *Create Lasting Impact*.

In Rotary, we give members a place to belong. We help keep students in school. We organize vaccination campaigns that protect children. These results are real, and they matter deeply. But to create lasting impact asks a harder question: What happens next?

We turn friendships into lifelong bonds. We help each other change for the better. And we measure not just what we did but what changed and whether that change will endure. That shift is what the message *Create Lasting Impact* is about.

Nowhere is that distinction more important than when we talk about peace. Peace must be deliberately pursued. It must be built into the design of what we do, not assumed as a by-product.

Last year, Rotary launched a program of scale in Colombia called Pathways to Peace and Prosperity. It works in communities scarred by decades of armed conflict, poverty, and forced displacement.

The program trains local leaders in conflict resolution. It pairs economic empowerment with peacebuilding skills. It builds the capacity of communities to manage disagreement and work toward reconciliation, together.

As one Rotary leader in Colombia put it, “By building peace from the ground up — with dignity, opportunity, and trust — we are planting the seeds of transformation that will grow for generations.”

That is what deliberate peacebuilding looks like. And that is the standard I am calling all of us to bring to our work this year. As part of everything we do, we must ask: Does this create the conditions for peace? Not just improving lives, but building the trust, the understanding, and the structures that make lasting peace possible.

And we must keep our most important commitment: We *will* eradicate polio.

In Afghanistan, medical workers are now using needle-free jet injectors to vaccinate children in communities where fear and distrust once kept families away, and it is working. Innovation is helping us reach the unreachable.

But we cannot rest now. Funding is under pressure globally. This is precisely the moment Rotary must hold firm. Every child protected is one step closer to a promise kept to every family in the world that will never have to know this disease.

In just a few weeks, I will formally assume the title of president of Rotary International. It is a responsibility I do not take lightly and one I could not take on without the support of Precy, our family, and every one of you. Together, we are an unbroken chain, and to grow, we must forge new links in that chain.

As Larry said, we have a goal of 1.25 million Rotarians and 125,000 Rotaractors by 2030. Each new member represents a person who has not yet had their Rotary story. They are out there. And they are waiting for us to welcome them.

So here is my challenge to you: Look back at the last five to seven years in your club. Find your best year for membership growth and retention. Then do better than your best.

This year is our turn to forge the next link in that chain. Our turn to be changed by Rotary. To build the future we wish to see. To pursue peace deliberately. To *Create Lasting Impact* — across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.

Xièxiè. Thank you.