



ROTARY FOUNDATION CHAIR'S REMARKS

Holger Knaack
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Dear friends, when Arch Klumph proposed the creation of our Foundation in 1917, he did it for a simple reason. He believed that Rotary clubs could achieve more together than they could on their own. More than a century later, that idea is still the engine of everything our Foundation does. And I want to speak with you today about why it matters more than ever.

Let me begin by saying thank you. Thank you for taking the time to be with your friends in Taipei. Thank you for the service you have given, the gifts you have made, the clubs you have built and rebuilt.

The Rotary Foundation does not exist in some tower in Evanston. It exists in your districts, in your clubs, in your hands, and in your hearts. And it is a Foundation that should make us proud.

Our Foundation is unique. Most of the decisions about how Foundation money is used are made by you — the districts, the clubs, the donors — through district grants and global grants, across our areas of focus. Very few foundations of our size and reach can say that.

Think of what that produces. It produces global grants for maternal and child health, for basic education, for disease prevention, for clean water and sanitation, for economic development, for protecting the environment — grants shaped by the Rotarians who know their communities best. And it produces partnerships that reach far beyond our own members.

We have a world-class charitable foundation. Charity Navigator has rated The Rotary Foundation four stars for 17 consecutive years. That says our Foundation is cost-effective, well managed — and the projects we support have significant impact. The work we do through the Foundation is the deepest proof of its value.

Our professional staff plans, executes, and monitors every project with discipline. Our member experts — our Cadre of Technical Advisers — help every club craft global grants that have lasting impact. And our clubs, everywhere in the world, do the actual work on the ground. Trust of that kind is earned a long time in advance. We have earned it. Rotary is not going anywhere — because Rotary is everywhere.

Let me give you one example out of thousands. Portugal's Ria Formosa lagoon once held the world's largest colony of seahorses — a colony that had collapsed by 96% due to illegal fishing and habitat destruction. Through a global grant, the Rotary Club of Almancil International, [Portugal], and the Rotary E-Club of Baobab established two marine conservation areas, working with scientists who had tracked the seahorse population for 20 years. Every three months now, divers go down to count. The colony is no longer just stable — it is growing. We do not run on hope. We run on evidence and measurement.

Now consider our Programs of Scale. These grants support Rotary-led, evidence-based programs that have already proven they work, with grants of US\$2 million to scale them up over three to five years.

Our first, in Zambia, trained and equipped 2,500 community health workers to combat malaria and strengthen public health. I have just seen this work for myself, on the ground in Zambia. The program reached 1.3 million people. And one year after the grant ended, 94% of those community health workers were still actively testing and treating malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhea in their communities.

The success of that program illuminated the key role that Rotary members play in sustainably improving health systems. The Gates Foundation and World Vision came to us. They asked to collaborate with Rotary on ways to improve healthcare across four African countries — a \$30 million Rotary Healthy Communities Challenge, run in partnership with local and national governments. Our partners sought us out. That does not happen by accident.

Since Zambia, our Programs of Scale grants have grown. Maternal and child health in Nigeria. Cervical cancer prevention in Egypt. Water access and sustainable farming for tens of thousands of rural families in India. Positive Peace in Colombia. Each one building on what we learned from the one before.

And today, I am very proud to announce the grantee of the sixth program of scale. It is Collaboration for Sustainable Water and Sanitation Systems in Haiti. It is an ambitious program. It begins with focused, intensive work on the ground with community members. And it is designed, from the start, to scale across the country.

The program is Haitian Rotarian-led. It builds on years of patient Rotary work in partnership with Haitian organizations and the national water agency. Its goal is to cut waterborne disease by 25% by training the local committees, the local water operators, and the mayors who will sustain the work long after our grant ends.

It takes on one of the most difficult operating environments in our hemisphere. And it answers a question that matters to every Rotarian in this room: Can we deliver lasting change in places where change is hardest? This program is going to prove we can.

Our latest grantee is not the only initiative I want to tell you about today. The field of

finalists this year was so strong that your Trustees are expanding our work against malaria in Papua New Guinea through the Rotary Healthy Communities Challenge, with further investment from the Gates Foundation.

The Papua New Guinea arm of Rotarians Against Malaria, supported by local Rotary clubs, has led the fight against malaria in Papua New Guinea for nearly 30 years. This latest grant allows them to expand training to an additional 2,100 community malaria volunteers in over a thousand villages across thirteen provinces, with the goal of cutting malaria deaths in half.

In addition to high-impact projects across our areas of focus, your Rotary Foundation is also nurturing leaders who will do this work for the next generation. Through our Rotary Peace Centers, at nine universities across five continents, we have trained more than 1,800 peace fellows since 2002. No other humanitarian organization in the world runs a program like this.

Our peace fellows serve in governments. In the United Nations. In nongovernmental organizations. In peacekeeping forces. In their own communities. Our newest center opened just last year, at Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul, focused on peacebuilding in the Middle East and North Africa. Our next center opens in 2027, at Symbiosis International University in Pune, India. And by 2030, we will have a peace center in Latin America. Peace is not a slogan for us. It is a discipline. And we are training the people who will carry it forward.

There is one other critical program managed by The Rotary Foundation: our top corporate priority, ending polio.

President Francesco spoke yesterday about polio funding, and you will hear a detailed update in a few minutes.

The world is still at great risk of polio in areas of conflict and war. Polio viruses continue to turn up in wastewater samples in Europe. The danger is not behind us.

What many Rotarians may not realize is how carefully we steward the dollars you give to PolioPlus. We don't simply write a check to WHO and UNICEF. Each year, we meet with our partners to review the budget of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative and do a depth analysis of progress and opportunities and conduct a financial audit.

For Pakistan's National Immunization Day alone — US\$22 million — we pay for 350,000 health workers. We pay for 20,000 motorbikes to reach remote villages. We pay for 4,000 vehicles. We pay for 20 boats that carry vaccinators along the Indus.

The smallest line in the entire budget is for the purple markers we use to mark a child's finger after vaccination. Every line. Every cost. We see them all.

This is what it takes to vaccinate 47 million children under five in a single country. And the health workers do this work supported by 100,000 army and police personnel.

Because in some places, this work is dangerous, and too many have already lost their lives on the job. President Francesco saw this sad list of names with me on our visit to Pakistan.

I have traveled to India frequently in recent years. I saw often what polio leaves behind — people crawling in the dirt, begging. But I have never seen a child affected by polio, because polio no longer exists in India. And what we made true in India, we will make true in Pakistan. In Afghanistan. In every place where this fight is not yet won.

And yet — look at where we are. Since Rotary committed to this fight in 1985, more than 20 million children have been spared from paralysis. We are closer to eradicating polio than humanity has ever come to eradicating any disease except smallpox.

The work has been worth every dollar. Every drop of vaccine. Every Rotarian who has stood at a door and helped a mother understand why two drops would change her child's life forever.

This is the promise we have made to the children of the world. We can't stop just before we reach our goal. As we do every year, we will reach our US\$50 million target and receive a US\$100 million match from the Gates Foundation.

Every Rotarian giving, every club giving, every district committing of its District Designated Fund — and we'll make it again this year. And every year, until the work is done.

Here's how you can help: Every Rotarian, Every Year. This remains the basis of everything our Foundation does.

When each of us gives every year — whatever the amount — we tell the world that Rotary is serious about the work we have committed to. For those who can give more, the Paul Harris Society is the path — a higher annual commitment leading toward Major Donor. And our Endowment, built through bequests and outright contributions large and small, ensures the work we do today continues long after we are gone.

But I am asking more than that. When you go home from this convention, you will be in conversations I will never be in — with friends who have never given to the Foundation, at fundraisers in your communities, in your clubs, week after week.

And in those rooms, you are the Foundation. Tell the story of what your gifts have built: the seahorse colonies recovering, the clean water flowing where it never flowed before, the malaria treated in villages hours away from the next clinic, the children spared from polio, the peace fellows working in difficult places. Your voice will be heard. Please, use it.

Arch Klumpp told us a century ago that we could do more together than alone. He was right then. He is right now. Our job is to keep proving it.

Everything we do opens another opportunity for someone, somewhere. Together, we create lasting change. Together, we end polio. Together — always.

Thank you.