

## **Jonathan Majiyagbe – Keynote Speech**

President, Rotary International

95<sup>th</sup> International Convention

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My dear friends – all of the members of the family of Rotary –

It is my pleasure to address this convention once again.

All of us want to accomplish so much while we are here – we want to see old friends and make new ones, we want to visit the many displays and booths to learn more about Rotary, we want to experience the delights and fascinations of Osaka.

When we think of everything we want to accomplish, it certainly seems like these short few days spent in a whirlwind of activity will not give us enough time. Can we really experience the full depth and breadth of Rotary fellowship? Will we be able learn about the programs of RI and our Foundation? Will we be able to expand our horizons by exploring Osaka and the surrounding area?

I assure you that we can. And what's more - this convention provides us with ample opportunities to strengthen our commitments to each other as the worldwide Family of Rotary. In so doing, we will experience the feeling of life-affirming joy that permeates every gathering of Rotarians – including our club meetings, our district and zone events and of course, our annual conventions.

It is a joy that I have experienced everywhere I have traveled in these past months – a joy that is always accompanied by profound gratitude. As my year of service as your president draws to a close, I feel more grateful than ever to be a part of this vast Rotary family.

We are a family on the brink of a great milestone – our Centennial Anniversary – next year when Glenn Estess will lead us all to ***Celebrate Rotary***. And to prepare for that great celebration, we are honoring our past while we plan for our future.

In the immediate future, clubs and districts are working hard to meet our ambitious centennial goals—goals that many clubs and districts are already working hard to meet: establishing a Twin Club relationship with a Rotary Club in another country; carrying out special centennial service projects; supporting The Rotary Foundation's *Every Rotarian, Every Year* program and working to increase Rotary's membership worldwide.

But we must also consider our more long-term future, which is why the RI Board called for the development of Rotary's first-ever Strategic Plan – a process that aims to bring much-needed continuity to an organization that changes its leadership every year. The main goals of the Strategic Plan were developed from surveys and interviews with grassroots Rotarians, Rotary senior leaders and staff.

They are:

- Eradicate polio
- Sharpen program focus
- Select new corporate program focus
- Refine governance/leadership structure
- Improve training and education at all levels
- Expand and integrate membership globally
- Enhance public image

Now, RI's Strategic Planning Committee is working with other Rotarians and staff to develop strategies and timetables for meeting each of these crucial goals. I urge all of you to learn more about the strategic plan by visiting the Rotary Web site at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org), where you'll find excellent presentations on the subject available for download.

Our Strategic Plan will help keep Rotarians united as we face the challenges of the coming years – and it will help us stay focused as we work to increase our membership.

I believe that our membership will increase only if we improve our retention rates. In considering how we will do that – let us remember not only why we joined Rotary –but why we stayed. Most of us joined Rotary because we wanted to help others, and because we didn't want to do it alone. I believe that most of us stayed because we made friends and because Rotary became an important part of our lives.

I am convinced that if all of our clubs offered the kind of caring fellowship that I and so many others have enjoyed in Rotary, no members would ever want to leave. Throughout the Rotary world, clubs and districts have supported the family of Rotary concept by appointing enthusiastic, creative members to chair their Family of Rotary committees. Rotarians are creating new opportunities to ***Lend a Hand*** to the Family of Rotary by reaching out to include the spouses and children of Rotarians in their activities.

As I traveled throughout the Rotary world this year, speaking to clubs and districts about this idea of the Family of Rotary, I came to a realization. The Family of Rotary concept has actually been a part of Rotary life for many, many

years. The only thing that is new is that now we have a name for it. Now we have Family Month on the Rotary calendar in December. And now we have Family of Rotary committees planning and carrying out exciting, family-oriented projects and events.

Like most families, our Rotary family offers comforting traditions, asking that we honor those who came before us and celebrate our newest arrivals. And like most families, our Rotary family provides a foundation of love and support that we can share with others. Indeed, I have seen that the Rotary family is one that is filled with so much love that it can gather the entire world in its embrace.

I have personally felt the warmth of that embrace – and I will forever be grateful for the tremendous outpouring of sympathy and support you extended to me and my family following the death of my wife, Ade, just last year. As so many of you know, Ade believed deeply in Rotary and its power to affect change. Your contributions to Ade's Hope Fund for the Education of Women and Children have been a loving tribute to her commitment to the goal of universal literacy and education – and I thank you.

I have also seen how the loving embrace of the Family of Rotary changes the lives of people all over our world. Time and again, Rotarians have reached out to ***Lend a Hand*** in this year's areas of emphasis for humanitarian service: poverty, illiteracy and health concerns.

In Bangladesh, I saw Rotarians building a center for impoverished children. Instead of milling about the streets in filthy conditions, these children will have a safe, clean facility in which to learn and play.

In Manila, I saw Rotary clubs working closely with Rotary Community Corps to reclaim an entire area of the city – refurbishing dilapidated houses, cleaning streets, improving and expanding local shops and businesses through microcredit loans.

On the island of Fiji, I saw Rotarians working with the local government and healthcare professionals to organize a health fair to provide health education, screening and treatment referrals for the island's poorer residents.

And in South Africa I visited The Kotulong Community Centre Project - an initiative of Rotary clubs in District 9300 and throughout the world. Aimed at improving the quality of life for people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, the project also has the support of South African businesses, government and local communities.

It has been exciting to see all of this good work – and more. I have also been inspired by the enthusiasm of the thousands of Rotarians who have attended Presidential Celebrations so far this year. Fifteen of these mini-conferences were scheduled to take place throughout the Rotary world this year

– each one focusing on just one aspect of Rotary – such as Vocational Service, or the Rotary Foundation, or health concerns. By keeping our topics so specific, we were able to go into greater detail in a shorter amount of time.

We had another goal in planning these conferences – and that was to maximize opportunities for participation. We were mindful of keeping costs reasonable – an effort that was greatly assisted by local Rotarians who handled the organization and registration.

I will admit to you now that it was a somewhat demanding schedule – but it was well worth it. Every one of the fifteen Presidential Celebrations was a true festival of service and fellowship. To share the information and inspiration that transpired at these events, we have developed a small book entitled *Celebrating Service: Success Stories from the 2003-04 Presidential Celebrations*. If you are interested in learning more about Rotary service around the world, you can find this book at the Publications Booth or order it from RI.

It was particularly rewarding to see how these one-day events attracted the attention of government leaders. In Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo gave his unqualified support and in India, we were honored by the presence of the President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo attended the celebration in the Philippines, and Crown Princess Victoria joined us in Sweden.

These leaders – along with many other representatives of governments and non-government organizations – came to the Presidential Celebrations to express their gratitude for the work Rotary does in their countries. They pledged their support and shared their own creative ideas about how Rotary can continue to work with governments to alleviate poverty, raise literacy rates and improve the health of people everywhere.

These leaders also expressed their recognition of what Rotarians already know – that in nearly one hundred years, Rotary has matured into a vital, potent force for peace. I believe that our second century of service will see even more partnerships with governments and non-government organizations.

Paul Harris envisioned these kinds of relationships for our organization when he said that “Rotary is an integrating force in a world where forces of disintegration are all too prevalent; Rotary is a microcosm of a world at peace, a model which nations will do well to follow.”

More and more, Rotary is indeed a model that nations want to follow. They know, as we know, that the connection between humanitarian service and peace is clear. 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. Together we will reach out in fellowship and service, to **Lend a Hand** wherever it is needed.

I offer to you the words of a brave man who changed history, dedicating his life to peace through 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 written several chapters of that new history. All of you will play a key role as we continue to make new history.

Our first hundred years will stand as an inspiring record 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 believe that in our next century of service – Rotary will exceed our greatest expectations.

It is an honor to be a part of Rotary during this great milestone. It is our privilege to stand at this crossroads – knowing that the peaks of the past are merely the foothills of the future.

And it is our responsibility to take Rotary into our next century – a century in which we will **Lend a Hand** and **Celebrate Rotary** with even greater fellowship and countless acts of service.

Let us face this bright and challenging future with faith, with enthusiasm, with determination and most of all, with joy as we -

**Lend a Hand** to alleviate abject poverty  
**Lend a Hand** to educate the illiterate  
**Lend a Hand** to relieve the scourge of disease  
**Lend a Hand** of fellowship to all of the family of Rotary.

Thank you.