

## **Plenary address – Paul Rogers, Bradford University**

Rotary International – Osaka Convention  
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As the Rotary movement approaches its hundredth year, it is obvious to us all that one of the core aims of the movement has never been more essential.

Promoting international understanding is critical to any hope of ensuring a more peaceful world, and Rotary's work, with more than a million members across the world, will surely become even more important as it enters its second century.

The events of recent months tells us more than ever of the need to work for peace. So many peoples have recently experienced the effects of conflict, not least our host nation for this convention, that it is obvious to all of us that the work we must do is so crucial.

It is less than sixty years since the end of the world's greatest conflict, and people sometimes think that we have since experienced a period of peace.

The past three years have proved that to be a nonsense, but the huge costs of conflict far transcend this recent bitter experience.

From 1945 to 2000, there were at least 120 major wars. In that time, more than 25 million people were killed and 75 million seriously injured.

From Korea to Afghanistan, Vietnam to the Horn of Africa, in Southern Asia, Central America and the Middle East, scores of conflicts have raged – some of them for decades.

While there has been some progress, not least in Sri Lanka, Sudan and Northern Ireland, many other conflicts have proved intractable.

We face difficult problems in Iraq and Afghanistan, and numerous incidents of political violence cast a shadow across the world.

From Bali to Casablanca, from Djakarta to Karachi and from Istanbul to Madrid, we have witnessed the deep and lasting damage to human communities in a new manifestation of conflict that seem to have no end.

Moreover, and as Rotarians know full well, conflicts have a human impact that goes far beyond the immediate deaths and injuries.

One remarkable feature of Rotary is the extraordinary work that its members do in responding to emergencies and disasters.

It is work that takes many forms.

Often it involves immediate relief – the provision of shelter, clean water, food and clothing to those in sudden need.

It may also mean sustained help with rebuilding shattered homes and lives, or the provision of medical relief.

What such work points to, time and time again, is the wider and longer-term impact of war.

When the guns are finally silenced and peace returns, the aftermath can be as tortuous and damaging as the war itself.

Indeed, sometimes more so.

When war affects poorer countries especially, it can have a fundamental and devastating effect.

Communities that may have struggled for years to develop even basic health and education services can see these destroyed in days. This may set them back a decade or more and causing further illness, poverty and suffering.

A bridge may be wrecked and there is no money to pay for a replacement, so crops cannot be taken to market and whole communities slip back into poverty.

Land mines can render productive croplands too dangerous to cultivate, taking away the very life-blood of communities.

Longer-term effects can be even more pernicious.

Take the example of polio. One of Rotary's most notable contributions is its sustained campaign to help eradicate this disease.

In my childhood I can remember the awful effects of what was then called "infantile paralysis", some years before the vaccines began to become available.

Young children were condemned to spend years in "iron lungs", struggling to breathe through damaged lungs.

Later, in the 1960s, I worked in Uganda and elsewhere in East Africa, and saw the effects of polio on generations of children and young adults, struck by the disease before the mass vaccination campaigns had started.

For a decade or more, Rotary has worked with the World Health Organisation and others to make sure that such suffering will be banished from the face of the earth.

But, as it has done so, it has become obvious that some of the last places in which the polio virus has hidden have been in those parts of the world that have recently experienced conflicts.

In this, and through so many other aspects of their work, Rotarians are perhaps more conscious than most people of the enduring effects of war. It is hardly surprising that Rotary International and its Foundation work so hard to improve international understanding.

Historically, one of the most productive approaches to improving international understanding has been the Ambassadorial Scholarship programme, bringing young people to study for a year abroad.

My own university at Bradford in England has been the happy recipient of many such students, and they have added much to the work of our Peace Studies centre, as well as meeting Rotarians throughout our region.

Also very useful have been the Group Study Exchange visits, enabling people to engage in a sustained way with Rotarians in cultures that are often so different from their own.

Such schemes do much to promote international understanding, as indeed do conventions such as this. The Ambassadorial Scholarship scheme has involved tens of thousands of young people, and Group Study Exchanges have been of great benefit to many, many more.

Furthermore, Rotary has now responded in an extraordinarily far-sighted manner to develop its skills and experience in a new programme that combines the best of Rotary's broad aims with specific intentions to promote peace.

I speak here of the Rotary World Peace Scholars programme – one in which, again, my university is a proud participant.

Under this remarkable new programme, ten experienced young professionals go to each of seven university centres across the world to engage in advanced study in peace and conflict resolution for two years.

The scheme started two years ago and there are now nearly 140 students engaged in the programme, with the first students due to graduate within three months.

The Rotary International Study Centres in Peace and Conflict Resolution are spread across the world and, in a way, do themselves illustrate the global nature of the Rotary movement.

Here in Japan, one of the centres is at the International Christian University in Tokyo and, on the far side of the world, another is the Spanish-language centre at Salvador University in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In Australia, the University of Queensland, with its long-standing expertise in peace research, hosts a centre. The French-language centre, meanwhile, is located at the prestigious Institute for Political Studies, Sciences Po, in Paris.

In Britain, my own Department of Peace Studies at Bradford University hosts a centre, and in the United States, the University of California at Berkeley does likewise.

Finally, a unique combination of the private Duke University, and the state University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill co-host a centre.

The students joining these centres invariably combine academic competence with field experience. Few are under 25, most are in their 30s or older, and all have an abiding commitment to promoting peace.

Their backgrounds are often quite remarkable. One of our own students has four years experience working in Central Africa, another is a police superintendent from Mauritius.

Another has more than twenty years experience working as a mediator, much of it in Central America. Still another speaks five languages fluently.

They bring an extraordinary range of experience and, during their studies, are able to combine this with academic work designed to improve their skills and make them more effective as peace-makers.

But the centres themselves are no ivory towers, standing aloof from the real world. Many of them have staff who are deeply engaged in conflict prevention and mediation. In my own department we have people who are thoroughly experienced in such issues.

Current staff are heavily involved in the Balkans, the Middle East, West Africa, Central America and South Asia, and former students have gone to work in all of these areas and many more.

In due course we confidently expect that Rotary World Peace Scholars will go on to make specific and wide-ranging contributions to the promotion of peace in many parts of the world. Indeed, over the initial six-years of the programme some 400 people from at least 50 countries will graduate and go on to make their contributions.

The Rotary World Peace Scholars Programme is a unique programme of profound vision.

Much of Rotary's work is concerned with emergency aid to those in obvious and immediate need. Other parts of its work, such as Polio Plus, are concerned with longer term issues yet have immediate and obvious effects.

At the other end of the scale are the Ambassadorial Scholars, the Group Study Exchanges and other programmes that serve the general purpose of increasing international understanding.

The Peace Scholars programme combines the best of both approaches. It is concerned with specific if global problems but seeks to address them in terms of their root causes – intending to work towards a more peaceful world in a positive and truly innovative way.

In recognising the significance of this programme, we should acknowledge the specific and substantial debt we owe to Rotarians in our host country of Japan.

A large part of the entire funding for the new programme has come from Japanese Rotarians. Indeed, it has been a key component of the entire scheme.

It is further proof, if any were needed, of the commitment to peace of this thriving member of the world-wide Rotary family.

What is perhaps most remarkable of all about the Rotary World Peace Scholars Programme is its sheer vision. This is an investment not so much in our own future but in that of our sons and daughters and their children.

We see daily the effects of war across the world and we worry about the future. What Rotary is doing is moving beyond such concerns to engage in practical programmes of immense potential.

As someone from outside the Rotary movement it has been an education for me to work with Rotary over the past decade in the development of this new programme.

Over that period, I have learnt much of the hidden work of Rotary and its positive effects across the world. This new programme is a remarkable and powerful addition to that work.

Perhaps I may be permitted to conclude by seeking to speak on behalf of the staff in all of the seven peace studies centres across the world.

Thank you for your vision and commitment to this new programme.

May we work together to build a more peaceful world.