

## **Opening Address to the 81<sup>st</sup> District Assembly**

The Rotary International President's Personal Representative, PDG Lloyd Whitfield and Penny;

Past RI President Rajendra Saboo and Usha the Inspiring;

District Governor Hamid and Memuna;

Session Chair PDG Nelson;

My Lords Spiritual and My Lords temporal;

My Friend, Partner, Confidante and Spouse, Dorcas Bagadde;

All of you My dear Friends;

Bana.

The wishful thinkers in DG Hamid and I would like to believe that you are all here in such large numbers to listen to moving Rotary speeches and experiences so that we all go back to our clubs fired with a new enthusiasm. The realists in DG Hamid and I only have to look eastwards at the sandy sunny beaches and the beauty of the Indian Ocean to know why you are all really here! Nevertheless, please permit me a twenty minute interruption of your enjoyment for some Rotary work. Call it the policy statement, or a statement of intent for 2006-07 if you will.

This is the last of a long series of preparatory training and team building events that have included, in each of the countries Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda: Club Officers Training training for the incoming Boards; Presidents Elects Training and Team Building; and Rotaract Officers Training. We also had the District wide District Team Training and Team Building Event in Nairobi. These events were for me like a voyage of exploration of the Rotary spirit in this District: I learnt a lot, and I was inspired by the determination and focus of Rotarians and Rotaractors. I was given insight of the challenges faced by Rotary and Rotaract through frank discussions and inputs, and the solutions proposed, not by me, but by the same Rotarians and Rotaractors. I had been daunted by the challenge of being the chief servant of this wonderful and complex district 9200: at the end, I felt relief because there were obviously so many willing and able hands, that challenges became a question of when, not if. I have had a lot of fun and enjoyed it all. I thank you all for being my teachers and friends.

And yet in this thanking, I must single out a few names, not because they are the only ones who worked and contributed, but because they were the strong foundation stones for these training and team building events. Our indefatigable District Trainer PDG Varinder, always available; Our District Governor DG Hamid, who has not only involved me in all decisions and given me insights into the challenges, but welcomed my family into his family; my friend and erstwhile incoming District Secretary Chris, snatched away from me to become District Governor Nominee; Our Nangwa and

Chair of the Planning Committee, Abel Atwooki Katahoire, the friend who brought me into Rotary; Hatchet Man Stephen Mwanje (who, together with PDG Varinder and Chris make a matched set in vertical disadvantage, attitude, and endurance of late evenings); the email power house Vincent; the Teacher Martin; our lady at the Rotary Office Deborah. In Addis Ababa, the in-coming Country Chair, PAG Samrawit Moges, the first lady Rotarian to be a Country Chair in our District. In Kenya, in-coming Country Chair Sam Okello and the dynamic ladies, Sudesh Walia and Geeta Manek; In Tanzania PDG Hatim the Good, Country Chair Ally and AG Faye Cran; and in Uganda, in-coming Country Chair James Tugume. And of course the person who empowers me, makes sure I am fit, and gives me permission for all this gallivanting, Dorcas. We have covered most of the ground. So today, we have a comparatively relaxed District Assembly, we consolidate, we focus.

Let me start by repeating that eternal challenge to our humanity, the spirit of Ubuntu, ***“I am because we are”***.

No other single concept I have grown up with so distils and captures the Rotarian-ness of true Rotary than this recognition that the well being of a community or any group of people is realised only through the welfare of everyone in that community. No one can truly enjoy the totality of well being, even if they are surrounded by all the material things they need, when they are spiritually and emotionally starved because others around them are suffering.

It is the recognition that when children are raped by soldiers, brutalised, and whole families forced into internally displaced people’s camps in Northern Uganda, we are all affected. It is the recognition that when there is famine in Kenya or disease in Mathare valley we are all affected. It is the recognition that if the people disabled by leprosy around Arusha lead a life as beggars and criminals, we are all affected. It is the recognition that if the people in the Woredas of the Ethiopian Highlands lack water for man and beast, and live with the daily presence of the threat of famine, we are all affected. It is the recognition that every Darfur, Bekaar valley, the slum areas of Mumbai, the beggars in Washington, are all fingers of accusation pointing at all of us, and demanding that we do something about it.

So we say, ***“I am because we are”***.

Why are we here? Please do not disillusion me by telling me the truth!

I like to think that our District Conferences are a celebration, a break after a hard year’s work on the battle fields where we fight ignorance, disease, poverty, and illiteracy. It is a break to say, yes, the job is still immense, but we did make a difference over the last twelve months to a child, a community, a country: some people somewhere are living more happily and with more hope because Rotary is, and we are Rotarians. To quote the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, that I must say resonate with what Usha the Gentle has told us: ***“to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know that even one life has lived easier because you have lived. This is to have Succeeded”***.

In our District, we combine the District Assembly with the Conference. In the District Assembly, today, the veterans of those battles, old and young, share experiences, and develop new strategies with the fresh lieutenants and captains. We learn from each other, we set new horizons and sometimes new battle plans. We fire each other with enthusiasm so that we are ready, at the end, to go and face our age-old enemies for yet another year.

RIPPR Lloyd, we know we are not alone in our efforts, because we are part of Rotary International. We know that President Carl Wilhelm Stenhammar and Monica have sent you and Penny to give us the assurance that, yes, the entire Rotary movement is with us in our celebrating, in our strategising, in our sharing experiences. When we set new horizons, we also work within the overall framework that has been defined by RIPE William “Bill” Boyd. He has given us our “lubimbi”.

We live in a world gone mad. Material well being has taken on more value than “Obuntu”. Corruption is the order of the day the entire world over. Planet Earth is reeling under the onslaught of the most dangerous being it has ever brought forth, homo sapiens. Global wealth is expanding by bounds that are almost impossible to believe, and yet, in mocking-contradistinction, human suffering and savagery have increased at the same rate. Rotarians and other people of good will must become the voice of sanity. We must stop dealing with only symptoms and start also addressing root causes.

Permit me to quote RIPE Bill Boyd: ***“In a world full of ethical challenges, where cooperation among countries and tolerance of differences is so vital to peace, Rotary provides a much needed example of solid integrity, international cooperation, and the spirit of volunteerism. My theme for the 2006-7 Rotary year, Lead the Way, reflects my belief in the power of Rotarians to change the world. Together, 1.2million Rotarians will Lead the Way to a brighter future through fellowship and service”.***

We are driven by the vision of a brighter future, not a brighter future for only you and I and our families, but a brighter future for all of humanity. We need this beacon to burn brighter, to return hope to the world gone mad.

What does the brighter future look like for our District? What is this vision that gives us the courage and the spirit to fight against seemingly impossible odds?

We have a future in our District when the news of corruption and human suffering are no longer the routine headlines – if you and I Lead the Way.

We have a future in which the quiet and unsung deaths of mothers during child birth are a thing of the past – if you and I Lead the Way.

We have a future in which malaria and AIDS will not ravage our populations – if you and I Lead the Way.

Our grand children will one day once again drink waters from taps and wells knowing it is absolutely safe – if you and I Lead the Way.

We have a future in which war, genocide, internally displaced people's camps, famine, and cholera epidemics are things children will read about in history books rather than social studies books – if you and I Lead the Way.

A future in which any child born can be assured of a good schooling, a caring community, a decent chance in life; A future in which our daughters and mothers are safe in their homes; A future in which simple decency is more important than material wealth: All is possible if We Rotarians Lead the Way!

RIPE Bill Boyd has identified four areas of emphasis that resonate with the needs of our District.

The first is the Family of Rotary, through whose strength we shall be equipped to construct the future we need. It starts with strong clubs and healthy vibrant clubs committed to actualising the ideals of Rotary. We need more Rotarians and more Rotary clubs. We need to re-invigorate our clubs with the vigour and the energy of younger members. We need to design our club programmes so that all the families of Rotarians belong and can fully participate in our activities.

Our future is the youth, and the Family of Rotary requires greater focus on Interact, Rotaract, and RYLA; young people imbued with the ideals of Rotary and “Obuntu” so that the future of mankind is secured.

The second is literacy. Picture yourself walking in room full of furniture in the middle of the night without the benefit of any light. You cannot see your way around; you cannot appreciate the beauty or enjoy the utility of the furniture. In fact, the furniture becomes an obstacle. Picture yourself coming here and looking to the east when you are blind. And yet, a major part of the population in our District goes through life like this: they are illiterate and therefore, for them, there is no light in the room, and they are totally blind. We cannot hope for human development, along with good governance and human rights, so long as our populations remain illiterate. Opportunities are closed and the horizons are limited for them.

Let us develop projects that will switch on the light, remove the blinders, so that we set up a real foundation for fighting all the other challenges we face. I have been privileged to open a workshop where RIPPR Lloyd and Penny were bringing teachers in Uganda up to speed on concentrated language encounters. There are many other creative and effective ways of addressing the challenge of illiteracy. Even as we address the immediacy of illiteracy among the adult population, let us lead the way in creating awareness and promoting policies that ensure that the children in the countries that make up our District can all have access to a decent education, so that we can look forward to a future in which illiteracy is word in the dictionary.

The third is water management, a challenge throughout our district. We must stop dealing with only the symptoms of polluted water and initiate projects along the entire value chain so that water resources are protected from pollution. We need to lead the way in creating public awareness and action at all levels of civic society right up to government policies. The natural filtration systems around many of our water systems, the swamps and wetlands, are being destroyed. Industrial effluent is recklessly dumped. We need to lead the way in addressing these challenges.

Each year, we watch the rains come, and we watch the water drain off, carrying our top soil along with it. Each year, we then suffer from the consequences of the dry seasons. We need to average the availability of water through water harvesting and simple dams. Let us follow the example of the late John Mbugua, RIP.

The fourth is the twin challenge of ensuring health and destroying the spectre of hunger. Health and Hunger. There are many projects we can develop, not just around curative approaches, but around preventive approaches in ensuring good health and the absence of hunger. The value chain includes timely access to relevant information about crop production and animal husbandry, and markets; training in good practices in water and soil conservation, irrigation, food harvesting, and storage. I remember a time in my village when it was compulsory for each family to always have a small plot of cassava plants, and a granary in which part of the harvest was kept for use during the dry seasons. Nowadays, I see local cultivators with bumper harvests of maize happily selling it all off and living it up for a while. A few months later, the same families will be begging for food.

In our District, and under this area of Health and Hunger, we have agreed the need to focus on the challenges of environmental conservation (which indeed includes water management), malaria, and AIDS. There are many willing partners for projects developed along these themes, and clubs are urged to work with communities, start Rotary Community Corps, and work with them to develop and implement projects that address these challenges. Rtn Faye Cran of Arusha, better known as Maama Kuku, has been exemplary in this area. Let us lead the way so that, as Rotarians, we can make a difference.

We have also, through a consultative process, set the following specific goals for some of our traditional areas of endeavour:

#### Membership Growth:

We shall aim for a net increase of 10% of the membership. There will be recognitions for the top 3 clubs in net increase of membership; the club with the highest net increase in lady Rotarians; and the club with the highest retention.

#### New Clubs:

The target is still open, but we need to address Rotary Extension in Ethiopia, Tanzania – which is now on the move, Kenya – which has done a lot but has much more to do, Eritrea – where Rotary now faces a major challenge of survival and calls for our efforts at all levels, and Uganda, where there is great need for consolidation.

We need to recreate awareness in Rotary Clubs about the purpose of Interact and Rotaract, and to remind them about their responsibilities and obligations in giving guidance and support to Interact and Rotaract clubs.

#### Financial support to the Rotary Foundation:

Through the permanent fund and annual giving, we shall raise at least \$150,000 from this District. It is possible. It will happen.

Service Projects:

This year, the District has drawn in funds totalling about \$4million for service projects. We need to improve this to about \$4.5 million: this averages only \$40,000 per club. Let us go for bigger integrated projects in the 3H range. Let us graduate to this level while not forgetting the smaller quick interventions.

We have however agreed that the time has come for us to address matters and targets of our District in a holistic and consistent framework. The following have been constituted into the District Strategic Planning Task Team (kindly stand up for recognition):

1. PDG Mohamed Abdulla - Chair
2. PDGR Abel Katahoire - Vice Chair
3. DGE Christ Mutalya
4. PDG Hamid Aboo
5. PDG Hatim Karimjee (As incoming District Rotaract/RYLA Chair)
6. DGN to be elected at Mombasa Conference
7. AG Sudesh Walia (To ensure that gender concerns are addressed by the plans)
8. Country Chair: Kenya:           PAG Sam Okello
9. Country Chair: Uganda           PAG James Tagume
10. Country Chair: Tanzania       PAG Ally Abdallah
11. Country Chair: Ethiopia       PAG Samrawit Morges
12. District Rotaract Representative   Rotaractor Jingo Allan

This team has been charged with consultatively developing a broad strategic framework for 10 years starting 2007/08 as well as a draft Strategic Plan for 3 – 5 years, starting 2007/08. These key documents will be approved during the 82<sup>nd</sup> District Assembly.

***Let me request the incoming Assistant Governors to stand up for a while.***

You are charged with making my humble presence available to the club Presidents whenever they need it. Make them your friends. You are their advisor and guide, not their boss. You have the delicate responsibility of having to enforce compliance with the administrative, financial and constitutional requirements of Rotary through guidance, through suasion, and through good example. This role will take up a lot of your time and resources. We all thank you for accepting to take on this responsibility.

***I would now like to request the incoming Country and District Officers to stand up for a while.***

You are the veterans, and you have accepted your assignments as experts. This of course demands that you read and consult widely, and more importantly be a complete Rotarian so that your expertise is based on solid experience rather than simply what you read. You are an expert resource to the Presidents and to the Assistant Governors. They will come to you for guidance, for training, in the specific

area of your assignment. Make yourself known to the clubs by visiting them and talking to them. Fire them to carry out activities in your area of assignment. We all thank you for always being available to serve.

***Let me now request the most important group, the Presidents-elect and our Presidents for 2006-7 to stand up:***

You, my Friends, are the captains of Rotary next year. Through you, the work of Rotary in our District is going to be raised to a new threshold. We shall have more members, more clubs, more service, and larger contributions to the Rotary Foundation than we have ever had before. Without your willingness and dedication, nothing can be done in advancing our dream and our action towards the future we want as Rotarians. On you lays the heavy responsibility of firing the enthusiasm and action of the Rotarians in your clubs. Your leadership qualities are what we all rely on, because that is the main resource you have in getting the job done. Lead by example. Know that none of us is perfect, and work with your club members appreciating this. Remember, as you lead, that you remain a Rotarian equal to any Rotarian in your club. Let me give you the words of Bill Boyd on this: ***“..In Rotary, no member is ever any more important than any other member. Some of us have greater responsibility, but no one has greater value”***

We all applaud you for taking on this great responsibility, and we are all at your service. Use us! Thank you.

My Friends, the future we want is possible if we all rededicate ourselves as Rotarians.

Mahatma Gandhi said, ***“Be the change you want to see in the world”***. I would like to end by similarly charging all of you and myself:

Be the change you want to see in your Rotary Club;

Be the change you want to see in your Community;

Be the change you want to see in our District.

Because if we as Rotarians Lead the Way, our children will see the future we want to see, and they will remember us with pride and, perhaps, a smile of joy.

Thank you for listening.

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District Governor 2006-07