

OPENING REMARKS AT THE 82ND DISTRICT CONFERENCE AND
ASSEMBLY, 16 – 19 MAY 2007,
SPEKE RESORT, MUNYONYO, UGANDA

Our Guest of Honour, HRH The Nabagereka of Buganda

The RIPPR, Dr Mike Abdalla and Jean

All our Invited guests in your different capacities

District Governor Elect Chris and his spouse, Rotarian Rose

Past District Governors and your Spouses

District Governor Nominee Kaushik and his spouse Assistant Governor
Geeta

My dear friend, adviser, and spouse, Rtn Dorcas

Members of the Press

All my friends the Rotarians from our District and around the World

Members of the press

Ladies and Gentlemen

Habari! Selemat! Muli Mutya! Murigye! Kopa Gho! Mutyena! Ngonio!
Sarukye! Good-morning! Bon jour! Salaam Alekoum! Kodheyo!

It is so wonderful to see you all here, from all the reaches of our District,
from Karagwe to Zanzibar; from Mombasa to Homa bay; from Addis Ababa
to Bahir Dar; from Mbale to Rukungiri; from Australia, England, German,
Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada, USA, you have all come so that, together,
we can celebrate Rotary and service. Our hearts are warmed by your
presence, and you strengthen the fire of service in all of us.

A special word of welcome to the Group Study Exchange Teams and
Ambassadorial Scholars present at this conference.

President Bob and my friends from the Rotary Club of Kampala North, thank you for the wonderful party you gave us last night, with special recognition to the artistic talent of the Kampala North Temptations. Before I proceed, I need to dispel a rumour that has been doing the rounds at this conference. It is alleged that the District Governor was seen doing some impossible strokes on the dancing floor last night. I have it on good authority, confirmed by Rtn Dorcas, that the District Governor retired to his room long before the dancing started.

My sincere thanks and appreciation goes to the team that has worked over the last three years to pull this conference together. This includes the core of the team in Uganda, and the District Administrative team members – the Country Chairs, the Assistant Governors and all who have been part of the mobilisation team. As of this morning, registration stood at..... Thank you all for Leading the Way!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A famous poet said “No man is an island, entire unto themselves”. If I may paraphrase this poet, we are all part of a continent, and when any part of it is washed away by the ocean, the continent is diminished. And the poet concludes, “Ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee”. The ethos of this poem captures the essence of Rotary, that as Rotarians, we see humanity as a whole. When any part of that suffers through hunger, thorough disease, through malnutrition, through illiteracy, through any kind of deprivation, the whole suffers; we all as individuals suffer.

And yet the essence of Rotary is not new to our cultures, and indeed it reflects the philosophy of Obuntu: the building into the entire societal fabric concern and respect for all those in our communities. This is what makes us Rotarians. It is our continuing challenge that we create alliances in our countries, in our regions, and around the world so that the recognition that we are all part of each other can stop the suicidal rush of humanity that is driven by self-centredness.

The bell tolls for you and I when a mother or the baby dies during child birth. The bell tolls for you and I when a child is crippled by polio or dies from easily preventable disease. The bell tolls for you and I when people suffer from hunger, malnutrition, and indeed starve to death when our

personal tables are loaded with food. The bell tolls for all for us whenever a death occurs through AIDS, malaria, measles, and other diseases.

It does not only toll for the death of part of us, it tolls in accusation that we have not done what we could have done about. We must make a change, create a difference. We are Rotarians so that we can be this change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to repeat a story many of you have heard when I visited your clubs, a conversation narrated to me by one of my daughters. She was taking a ride in one the suicidal public transport vehicles we call matatu in Uganda, and the passengers were listening to the matatu driver. The matatu driver was complaining that Uganda had become a country of ducks. Why? The passengers asked. He responded that mother duck feeds only for itself, never the ducklings, and one can grab and walk away with a duckling without mother duck raising a protest. On the other hand, he continued, Uganda should be a country of chicken, because mother hen would attack even a lion if it threatened one of the chicks, and always summons the chicks to eat when it finds even the tiniest insect, the smallest grain. A great lesson for all of us in a very simple story.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We chose as “Our Environment, Our Future” as our conference theme 30 months ago.

Let us become reflective for a while: The cycle of life and death, like the cycle of seasons, are inevitable, beyond our control. We only try to control the quality of both. Primitive man, more attuned to the continuum of life and death and being in oneness with the environment, appreciated and lived as part of the environment, maybe because of the immediacy of impact of changes on survival. Modern man has created artificial distance from the environment, forgetting that we are part of it.

We have torn its covering off in many places and raped it, creating desert. We recklessly tear into its guts with insatiable greed, not for survival, but for over-exaggerated material well being. We poison the water sources, our very life stream, with concentrated populations, industrial effluent. We destroy parts of the atmospheric cover that shield us from the negative

ravages of solar radiation. Drought, famine, pestilence, and disease, have become the order in many of our countries. We have lost focus on the continuum of life, and see life only in our personal time span on this beautiful planet. Like the crippling debt of many of our countries, we are creating a huge environmental deficit, to be painfully settled by future generations, many of them through their lives. *One sees the need to call the forgotten past modern, and the current times primitive.*

Our Environment, Our Future. Yes, we have come together to celebrate Rotary, but we must also reflect, think, and create action so that as Rotarians, we can make a difference.

My friends, let us be the change we want to see in the stewardship of our environment.

Together, let us Lead the Way so that our great grand children can look back at our times with pride.

Welcome once again, and I invite you all to enjoy the conference.