

Saint Petersburg
9 July 2005

Dear Russian Rotary friends:

In this extraordinary year filled with Rotary celebrations, we should look back on our first hundred years to reassert our identity:

- It is **vocation** and its practice that are the roots of the first Rotary Club:
 - Exchanging viewpoints, **making new friends based on tolerance and solidarity**, at a time when corruption and selfishness reign in Chicago in 1905: These were the motivations of Paul Harris and his friends.
 - We can surely say that **codes of ethics in every profession are a Rotary innovation**.
 - If we add the possibility of individual responsibility, free will, and rejection of scheming, we reach an ethical dimension that **imbues our behaviors and motivates our choices to give a coherent vision that is fair - to quote the philosopher Alain**.
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- Then, after two world wars, our movement decided to get involved in the furthering of peace and justice among nations.

Men like the doctor Schweitzer embodied this objective when they attended our club meetings.

- Of course, we do not have a **monopoly** on peace, but during our first hundred years of existence, we have opened many doors that lead to peace.
- **Eliminating** national, religious, and cultural differences is not on Rotary's agenda. To the contrary, the diversity of human expression is seen as a reason to rejoice and not as an obstacle to understanding.
- By the same token, without **freedom, justice, truth, commitment, and respect of human rights**, Rotary cannot survive and its ideals cannot prevail.
- Interpersonal relationships are our **main asset** as Rotarians. At the national, regional or international level, these relationships have on several

occasions and through mediation resolved border disputes, water access issues, and local crime, in Central America, in South America, in India, in Pakistan, in Timor, in Africa, in Europe, and in North America.

- However, we should also say that Peace first and foremost resides in ourselves, in our families, in our clubs, with one another, one for another, in our willingness to listen and understand.
Like Cicero said: "Freedom in tranquility."

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- During this period, a major event transformed our movement: The creation of The Rotary Foundation by Arch Klumph in 1917.

We then became a **vast service organization with educational, humanitarian, vocational, and youth programs.**

- Today, we have at our disposal many programs **to alleviate suffering and to give hope.**

Let's consider the following:

- **One third of the world population cannot read or write;**
- **Life expectancy does not exceed 45 years in some countries;**
- **Half the world population cannot fulfill their basic needs: food, water, shelter.**

There is no hope for those who cannot read or write; for those who do not have a roof; for those who are hungry; for those who do not have clean water, which is the reality of about one third of the world population.

- In that regard, dear Rotary friends, we can be proud of our fight to eradicate polio and of the 500 million Euros we committed toward this goal. This is quite a feat! What is even more remarkable are the 2 million Rotarians and volunteers who contributed their time so that we might say as soon as next year:

That's it. Polio has been defeated!

This was the history of Rotary until you joined.

It is a great pleasure to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of Rotary in the Russian Federation.

- ◆ In 1991, I visited for the first time the Rotary Club of St. Petersburg where I was welcome by Andrei Ibrahimov and the Rotary Club of Moscow where I was welcome by Vladimir Litvinov and Alexandre Makatsaria. I felt, like all visitors, a strong will to take action and, at the same time, to find a unique place in the Rotary world. The newly acquired freedoms generated a lot of enthusiasm, but there was also the unknown. Many original members have left, but some are still here and I would like to congratulate them.
- ◆ Then, I visited the Rotary Club of St. Petersburg Neva. At once, I felt a strong connection with all the members and each successive club president. I am proud to be an honorary member of your club and of the clubs of Moscow, Moscow Capital, Moscow Renaissance, and Naryan Mar.

We appreciate the efforts in world understanding and ethics that you made during a difficult period to promote the ideals of Rotary International.

- ◆ Then in 1995, we created the France-Russia Inter-Country Committee to participate in your expansion.
- ◆ The Inter-Country Committees are an instrument for peace. Talking about inter-country committees is like talking about Rotary friendship and remembering that Paul Harris saw in international exchanges a way to promote mutual understanding and, thus, reach the ultimate goal: achieve peace in the world.
- ◆ Rotary International's role as agent for peace was one of Rotary's great missions at the end of World War Two when Unesco and the UN were founded with, as you know, the active participation of Rotarians.

- ◆ In 1995, my club in Denain had already organized a large European meeting, as I was president. The Moscow, St. Petersburg, Naryan Mar clubs took part in this event that had for theme "Rotary's place in the Europe of tomorrow." This theme is no longer relevant for Europe is here and Rotary is present in every European country.
 - Then French Rotarians started to sponsor clubs (Naryan Mar, Moscow Rossica, Troitsk, Moscow Capital, St Petersburg White Nights, and the short-lived Moscou Kremlin);

- Ambitious projects were carried out to reduce maternal and infantile mortality rates in Russia;
- Youth Exchanges were many - especially with high school students from St. Petersburg and Valenciennes;
- The dancing and singing company Loktev performed in front of an audience of 8,000 during two memorable tours in France and Belgium;
- The assemblies in St. Petersburg and Moscow are well-attended;
- We helped you publish some documents to present Rotary;
- We have an ongoing project benefiting the hippotherapy center in Moscow in partnership with the club of Moscow Renaissance involving Igor Libin and Gian Paolo Marelllo;
- And many other projects too numerous to mention, but I would like to single out the Beslam project with the club of St. Petersburg Neva as well as our friends from the Inter-Country Committees in Holland and Great-Britain.

Today, as vice-president of Rotary International, I can assure you that the Board of Directors is particularly sensitive to and interested in the development of Rotary in Russia. Despite a slower expansion than expected we are looking forward to a new phase with the upcoming creation of a Russian district with the help of two Swedish and one Finnish districts.

In view of your qualities, I believe that this phase should be initiated and developed best by Russian Rotarians. I am convinced that you are capable of insuring this development keeping in mind three main ideas: **Training** with the necessary resources (documents in Russian); **information; and exchanges** (sister clubs, inter-country committees, Rotarian contacts all over the world.) In all these areas, you can always count on my support.

As you can see, dear Friends, the world needs a Rotary culture built on honesty, humility, peace and service – qualities that are a testimony to a philosophy of life and work ethics that inspired our founder Paul Harris. It is both our heritage and our message – the message of the Russian Rotarians to the world.
