

Cannes Conference Speech by Serge Gouteyron - 28 March at 3:00 p.m.

Dear Mayor,
Dear RI President,
Dear RI Directors,
Dear Past Presidents of Rotary International.
Dear Past RI Directors,
Dear RI Director-Elect,
Dear Inter-Country Committee National Coordinators,
Dear District Governors,
Dear RI Director-Nominee,
Dear Inter-Country Committee Chairs,
Dear Past District Governors,
Dear District Governors-Elect,
Dear Rotarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank all the Rotarians, spouses, Rotaractors, Inner Wheel members, and all the members of the Family of Rotary who are here to celebrate this occasion.

With a very special distinction for the largest delegation, that of the Russian Federation, which delights the founder and honorary president of the committee between France and Russia ; and also for the African Countries.

I would like to thank the host organization committee, the Rotarians of Cannes and Nice , the District 1730 team, District Governor Bernard Attard, Past District Governor Lucien Barth, and District Governor-Elect Chantal Pasqualini who have taken care of the logistics of this international conference.

Rotary has always been reflecting on the issues of the day while keeping in mind the place of man in the evolution of society.

This is how after World War I the “concept of mutual understanding and goodwill” was introduced at the Edinburgh Convention in 1921.

This convention adopted the fourth statement of the Object of Rotary: “The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service.”

Peace is not a Rotary exclusivity because world peace is part of a larger school of thought that has developed over the centuries characterized by tolerance and brotherhood, but Rotary still has a role to play.

Our meeting today that the President of Rotary International, Wilfrid Wilkinson, accompanied by his spouse Joan, agreed to preside, is designed to deepen our reflection, showcase what we are doing, and most importantly bring us further down the road we have already taken.

Dear friends, we should strive to be as daring as the generations of Rotarians and Rotary leaders that preceded us. They not only turned Rotary into one of the greatest service organizations, but also? one that embodies best the desire of peace for mankind.

Without being an army of reformers set to save the world, Rotarians have done much to make peace possible.

- For 23 years, we have been waging a fight to eradicate the poliovirus. I would like to sincerely thank our long time friend David Heymann, Assistant Director-General for Health Security and Environment at WHO and who is here in his quality of Representative of the Director-General of WHO, Dr. Chan, for Polio Eradication and who has been kind enough to take some time off his busy schedule to be among us.

- Very quickly, Rotarians realized that they could have an impact on mankind's destiny by getting involved in education. I would like to thank Professor Alain Bentolila who is also Vice-President of the Caisse? d'Epargne Foundation and the driving force behind the "savoir pour réussir (Learn to succeed)" network. He has written numerous reports for the government and French Rotarians know him well because we are working together to fight illiteracy. Professor Bentolila will talk about "Illiteracy: What is at stake culturally and socially" because "if you want peace you need to educate first." He will also take your questions.

- During and after World War II Rotarians actively took part alongside governments in the creation of new institutions in order to maintain peace and based their hopes on the dissemination of humane values. Mr. Gilbert Coutau and our representatives to international organizations in Europe, Asia, and Africa will talk about their role and how this role could expand since our priorities are on the same line as the UN Millennium Goals: Illiteracy, health, poverty, infantile and maternal mortality, promotion of ethics, and sustainable development.

- In the same spirit, Mrs Ann Belinda Preis, representative of Mr Koichiro Matsuura, General-Director of UNESCO, will confirm the commitment of UNESCO in favour of peace and the similarity of ideas that we share with the organisation.

- I would like now to mention the Inter-Country Committees (ICC) that act as “peace ambassadors” and thank their leaders (the executive committee, ICC coordinators and chairs) as well as Susan Schneider who is in charge of ICCs at RI World Headquarters in Evanston. Since the official creation of the first ICC in 1950 between France and Germany, their activities have become vital to Rotary because peace is constantly threatened. José Carlos Estorninho, Past Chairman of the ICC Executive Committee, and several national coordinators will talk about how ICCs have built bridges of friendship and how their simple and flexible structure has allowed them to extend Rotary service to isolated areas and countries where Rotary was unknown. Arthur Bowden, General Secretary of the ICC Executive Committee, will moderate a panel about the activities of the ICCs. More than 200 ICCs contribute to the dissemination of our ideal and we are delighted to welcome a new ICC India/France that will receive its charter tomorrow from the hands of RI President Wilkinson.

- Since Rotary launched its fight against polio, its most significant initiative has surely been the Rotary Centers for Peace and Conflict Resolution. Cyril Noirtin invited three alumni and I am sure that you will be proud of them and of our program. Judy Gibson, manager of the program in Evanston, will present the funding initiative designed to endow the Rotary Centers. And Gérard Moral, member of the Rotary Centers committee, will give us an update on the possibilities of having again a French-speaking center.

- For us Rotarians, Cicero’s definition of peace is the best suited: “Peace is freedom among tranquility.” We understand that peace is each Rotarian’s responsibility than more than it is the organization’s. If we do not have the magic power to create a new world, we can generate a chain reaction in order to create awareness and take action as the international panel moderated by Lucien Barth will demonstrate.

In the past 50 years and through the rise of its Foundation, Rotary International expanded its educational, humanitarian, and vocational programs to benefit youth and populations in line with our “Service Above Self” motto. All these programs contribute to the reduction of the gap between nations and to peace.

- A panel comprised of three RI Directors, Raffaele Palotta, Bernard Rosen, and Gordon McNally as well as RI Director-Elect (2009-11) Catherine Noyer-Riveau will tell you the concrete role played by Rotarians toward building peace.

- I would like to recognize some other senior leaders: current RI Director Kjell-Åke Åkesson, past RI Directors Mohamed Benmejdoub, Jacques Berthet, Julio Sorjus, and Carlo Monticelli, and RI Director-Nominee Ekkart Pandel.

- Finally, I would like to sincerely thank RI President Wilkinson who decided to have this conference. He will draw the conclusions of our meeting just before the Fellowship Dinner and Sunday's interfaith service that will take place in the incredible locale of St. Honorat Monastery and will include readings on peace from various faiths (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist).

To ensure the complete success of this event we are delighted that Past RI President and Past Trustee Chairman Carlo Ravizza, who came with his spouse Rossana, and Past RI President and current Trustee Carl-Wilhelm Stenhammar, accompanied by his spouse Monica, agreed to preside the plenary sessions. We expect them to share with us their ideas. Unfortunately, Past RI President and Trustee Chairman elect Jonathan Majiyagbe could not be with us because of some business he has to attend in Evanston.

- I believe that we will leave Cannes with the feeling that Rotarians can further promote international exchanges and an intercultural dialogue even if our organization do not allow us to interfere with conflicts.

They are ready to play a personal role in civilization clashes so that peace may be possible.

But we are not there yet. Thank you and I wish you a great conference.

Serge Gouteyron
 International Conference « Peace Is Possible »
 Cannes, 28 March 2008