

Dear Rotarians,

In writing this letter, my first thoughts go to the people of Haiti, dramatically affected by so awesome an earthquake. I have no words to express the pain, compassion and human solidarity that, I am certain, touch each one of us. Our sadness is increased by the sense of helplessness that we all experience: What can be done, how can we help those unfortunate people? Italian districts have agreed to join forces so as not to fragment the precious few resources available. It has been decided to channel all funds into one Institution which, for many years, has been upheld by several Italian clubs. Details are available in another page of this newsletter. I am particularly pleased that this synergy has been created because this is the only manner in which our intervention can have the concrete substance of which I have spoken throughout my year of office.

World Understanding is Rotary International's theme for the month of February. This ideal is significant enough, but it acquires even deeper meaning as, on 23 February, we celebrate the anniversary of the foundation of our association. We should bring to mind the figure and the achievements of our funder, Paul Harris, whose writings are more than valid in our days. It would be appropriate for all clubs to hold a discussion on this figure, whose writings still maintain fresh meaning indicating some problems that, unfortunately, have still not yet been solved in our times.

I would like to spend a few words on Peace and Understanding in the World. We must admit that it is quite ironic, today, to talk of Peace. The fall off the Berlin wall had given rise to great hopes for the abating of international tension and for more relaxed relations between the peoples of this Earth. Instead, we have to admit that the end of the Cold War has seen the coming of permanent instability and of a creeping state of war which is out of control. We have lost count of how many war hubs exist. In many regions, a permanent state of war is taken for granted, lived as a 'normal daily experience'. The list is alarming: The Middle East, Cecenia, Sudan, the Horn of Africa, Pakistan, Afghanistan, many zones of the Indonesian Peninsula and of Central and South America. The list could well continue, a long list of manifest war or of armed contrasts, of a scary and dangerous terroristic presence. In fact terrorism, especially Islamic terrorism, but also political terrorism, is at the roots of many of our actions. Ethnic and religious clashes have deepened creating obstacles to normal relations between States. It is within this far from encouraging picture that we are called to act with our limited and imperfect means. Was this the world we dreamed to leave to our children? Certainly not! Changing it will be difficult. Some may even go as far as to say that it is impossible.

But Rotarians are bound by the obligation of optimism and good will and, no matter how difficult the road may be, we are called upon to face it with imagination and determination. Of course, we cannot do much and cannot hope, on our own steam, to change the face of things. But we must try, leave no stone unturned. Rotary International provides us with resources that, albeit indirectly, contribute to World Peace. Every project carried out in the Third World to relieve hunger and poverty is a positive step towards peace. In fact it is impossible to talk of peace until people are under the stress of

being unable to satisfy their most elementary needs. Likewise, every step towards bringing literacy to those peoples is also a step towards understanding between the Nations. In his book 'My Road to Rotary'. Paul Harris wrote, 'Education is the only possible solution for international difficulties. No matter how many capable and valid leaders there may be, their incessant efforts to avoid war are always rendered useless by a mass of ignorant citizens dominated by 'strong emotive instincts'. The road to follow in order to elevate those populations is education.

As Rotarians, the most direct means is that of direct relationships between Clubs and between Rotarians. Instruments at our disposal are: Club twinings, cultural exchanges, Exchanges between Nations (CIP). I invite all Rotarians to become acquainted with these possibilities and to use them more meaningfully. I wish to make particular stress on the Inter-Nation meetings (CIP) because this is one of Rotary's programs that most enhances understanding between different Nations. Although there are, for these programs, some very active committees in our District, awareness is very fragmented. Much can be done to start off other committees and to assure that the existing ones attain more visibility. We happen to be an ideal bridge between Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Who better than us can act as go-between for these worlds? In my opinion we are called upon to create bridges of communication with the other shores of the Mediterranean, with nations different from ours with regards to culture, behavior, religion and traditions. Twinning with a Club in Eastern Europe may be an excellent opportunity for tourism, but would not go very far to improve understanding between the peoples of the Earth.

We are called upon to create 'Peace and Understanding' with 'the other side' with those who are 'different'. We have recently had news of unprecedented violence in Rosarno. It would be very easy to blame the contrasting parts or the authorities for not having kept control of a situation that was continually worsening. At the base of it all are those 'emotive instincts' which Paul Harris spoke of, a century ago. Fundamentally, it is the fear of the unknown, of that which is 'different' and fear is the result of ignorance and prejudice. Of course it is difficult to accept such large and imposing levels of immigration that seem to challenge our old certainties forcing us to deal with new cultures and different traditions. But it certainly is not easy for the immigrants themselves. They search work and safety for their families and often they find a new hell. The solution to the problem can only come from better mutual understanding which would allow reciprocal trust.

I, therefore, invite you to build various bridges of communication with the Peoples geographically close to us but culturally distant. This would be our important and unchangeable contribution to a better understanding between peoples, religions and societies.

I ask, 'Who, if not us? When, if not now?'

Let us take up this path, it will be an achievement that will be acknowledged us or an omission that will weigh upon us. Never as in this instance can we say that 'The future of Rotary and of the World is in our hands'

Yours in Rotary,
Francesco Arezzo

District Governor
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