

## **RI President-nominee's Acceptance Remarks**

Kalyan Banerjee, 2009-10 RI President-nominee

Montréal, Québec, Canada

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It is a great pleasure as well as a tremendous honor for me to accept this nomination to serve Rotary International as president in the Rotary year of 2011-12. I am truly overwhelmed by the confidence you have reposed in me, and I thank you from the depth of my heart for this incredible opportunity to serve the world's most outstanding service organization.

On an occasion like this, please permit me to look back a bit. Truth to tell, I had wanted to be a president in Rotary for a long, long time. But it was presiding over a Rotary club that I had originally in my mind. As a student in school aged about 10 or 11, I would sometimes accompany my uncle, who was then the president of the Rotary Club of Batanagar in District 3290 in Bengal in India, where I was born. I loved the way the Rotarians — only men, then — seemed to enjoy meeting friends and enthusing about complicated community service projects to benefit hundreds of people. I decided then that I must be a Rotarian as soon as I could make it. So, when Vapi — the newly developing industrial hub in Gujarat, close to Mumbai — started a club back in 1971, I waited for an opportunity to follow my Rotary dream and join. The invitation followed six months later, and then one thing led to another. And so, here we are today, my wife, Binota, and I, absolutely overcome as we stand before you at this convention.

In India, Rotary is a movement that is growing larger, more active, and more influential with every passing year. As I have seen more and more Indians choose to become Rotarians, and I have seen what those Rotarians have achieved, it has become clear to me that India and Rotary International are part of a symbiotic relationship: Each is making the other stronger.

Through the projects of individual clubs, through our international service projects, and above all, through PolioPlus, Rotary has become well regarded throughout India. For there, and indeed throughout the world, we are known as an organization of people who are honest and caring, who have both the desire and the capacity to help build a better future.

At our best, we are living up to the ideal of Mahatma Gandhi when he said, "You be the change you wish to see in the world."

In a way, some parts of India still exemplify a developing country, and this gives me, perhaps, a different perspective on Rotary's international service. I have seen the impact that our simplest projects can have. I have seen firsthand our work in literacy, in health, in hunger, in providing safe water — and I have seen the difference it makes to each village, each family, each individual human life.

In Rotary, every human life is equally precious. We strive through our service to elevate those lives, to give of ourselves, to share our resources and our talents to improve the lot of others less fortunate. We do this because we believe in the ideal of Service Above Self, and because we believe that dignifying the lives of others dignifies us all.

In every one of the world's religions, there is one common idea that when we give of ourselves, we receive our own reward — perhaps not materially but in the form of spiritual satisfaction and joy.

Through service, we are able to look within ourselves, to find reserves of generosity, of grace, and of care and concern, and to seek a deeper meaning to our daily lives. We discover what it means to help a human being and, in so doing, become more fully human ourselves.

As India's Nobel Laureate [in Literature], the poet Rabindranath Tagore, wrote: "I slept and dreamt life was joy. I awoke and saw life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy."

And so, I stand before you today in all humility as I thank you for the honor of this nomination, and I pray that I can serve Rotary to the best of my ability in the months and years to come.

Thank you.