



2013-14 PRESIDENT-NOMINEE'S SPEECH

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To describe this moment with a sense of utmost humility, to acknowledge the trust you have placed in me, I need to borrow the words from the late Martin Luther King's Nobel Prize lecture:

“Occasionally in life there are those moments of unutterable fulfillment which cannot be completely explained by those symbols called words; their meaning can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart. Such is the moment I am presently experiencing.”

When I was inducted into Rotary as a 21-year-old charter member, I called my grandfather and gave him this wonderful news. My grandfather himself had to wait for some time before he was admitted to Rotary membership in Sri Lanka's premier club! So, when he heard from me, delighted though he was, he must have believed that the standard of Rotary had come down; that it would invite into its fold a 21-year-old with long hair and hippie looks and holding his first job! Truthfully, those were the days when my grandfather worried whether anyone would even marry me, for the way I appeared!

But Rotary was already progressing and changing with the times and that change is tangibly visible today, when you elect as your president a simple Rotarian coming from a small, one-district island.

In doing so, you have established that in the eyes of Rotary, every member stands equal, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, creed, community, or country and that by itself is an ineffably beautiful tribute to the magnificence of our great organization.

And today as I stand here before you with Vanathy, I accept this role with a deep sense of duty and a solemn resolve knowing that I follow in the wake of those great architects, the former presidents of Rotary International (many of whose presence I acknowledge today) together with President Ron Burton and incoming President Gary Huang, who would have forged the history of our organization with vision and with vigor.

With Vanathy by my side, I pledge to enhance their legacy and extend its borders to wider frontiers.

I realize that we are at a momentous period in our history. The great battle we waged against the insidious poliovirus is slowly but surely drawing to its finite end, and we are continuing to reach out to thousands

with our humanitarian services. The alumni from our peace centers are beginning to play an increasingly important role, whilst our global grants are creating projects which are larger and more potent and more beneficial. But let us continue to be vigilant; let us not lull ourselves into complacency for we know our membership lingers and languishes (in areas where it should really grow). We know we have the technology created at our headquarters to help us communicate better, but falter because it is not being taken advantage of by many of our clubs, and we know that the glow of our Rotary brand must be made to shine brighter and louder, especially to those outside our organization.

These are the challenges we must face and face them we will; for the future before us is positive and our name and fame, as an organization founded on ethical standards and promoting humanitarian service activities, will flourish and will soar.

We will be fuelled by the proven capacity of our members to show passion in their work as they will continue to extend their arms in support to those who are starving and weak, those who are ignorant and illiterate, those who are elderly and infirm, and in general, to those who are trapped in the margins of our society.

This passion, together with the values inculcated within us, will be the fulcrum on which our progress will be founded, and as I say this I am conscious that like many of you, I too owe much to Rotary for reinforcing within me the values that my parents taught me. Today I can proudly proclaim that I am what I am in my life, because I was molded by Rotary. Yes, I can personally vouch for the ability of our organization to blend commerce with cause, friendship with service, and I know firsthand that each of us is lifted even as we lift others.

My dear friends, with the fervent faith that you will walk this path with me, and with the certain conviction that you will share the high tides and the low points of this journey with me, Vanathy and I accept this lifetime opportunity with great humility.

We will embark on this voyage confidently, with the blessings of the divine to guide us and the power of your prayers to sustain us.

We thank you.