President's welcome
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2012-13 RI President

Good afternoon! It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to Lisbon, and to this 104th Rotary International Convention.

In the days to come, Lisbon will be a Harbor for Peace as we celebrate together this wonderful year of *Peace Through Service*.

For me, this convention is a dream come true. It is part of my dream of a more peaceful world, a dream that began on an August day in 1945.

I was born in Japan in the year 1939. As a child, I understood that my country was at war. But when I think back to those days, the war did not affect us very much.

I was one of eight children. We were poor, and we lived in a remote village. For us, life went on as it always had. I did not see soldiers. I heard about the war, but as a child, I did not think about it. I did not think it had anything to do with me.

The day the war became real to me was the day it was over.

I remember listening to the radio with my family when Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender. I was six years old. We all stood and listened to his voice. The Emperor had never spoken on the radio before, and we did not know what to think.

The language he used was very formal. I was very young, and I did not understand what he said. But at the end of his speech, another voice came on the radio. It said that Japan had surrendered and the war was over.

The speech was broadcast at noon. I remember that the rest of the day was very quiet. People did not talk much. The adults did not say anything to the children. We did not know yet about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I understood only that something very big had happened.

The moment was a defining one for all of Japan.

Until that day, the country had been working together to win the war. Now, we would work together to rebuild. And we would work together to build a new identity for Japan, one that was committed to peace.

When I joined the Rotary Club of Yashio, Japan, many years later, Japan was a different place. Instead of armies and airplanes, we had schools, roads, and hospitals.

Life was better for everyone. Like everyone else in Japan, I had seen for myself the importance of peace.

But this was not why I joined Rotary. At the time, I did not think that Rotary service was connected to peace. This was something that changed when I learned about the idea of Service Above Self.

Of course, Rotary service builds peace in many ways. When we help to meet basic human needs, we take away the reasons for conflict. We end wars before they begin.

We care for the people who are fighting to survive so that they do not have to fight.

We build peace as well through our international service. We build connections between people and between nations. We reach out to people who are so different from ourselves, and we see how much we are really the same.

In this Rotary year, I have seen many ways that we build *Peace Through Service*.

Every Rotarian understands this theme in their own way. But for me, the words of our theme speak to the peace that I have found through my own Rotary service, by learning to put Service Above Self.

I have always been an ambitious person. When I went into business, I wanted to have the biggest and the best business, with the most customers and the best reputation.

I worked very hard, and I succeeded. But until I became a Rotarian, I did not think much about why I worked.

Through Rotary, I realized that I was working to make other people's lives better. I wanted to serve my customers, not only for my own profit but so they would be happier from my work, and my employees would also have better lives.

Now, I see my business in a very different way. And I see Rotary service as an idea that is not limited to my Rotary club. Everything we do for other people helps to make the world a better place.

Whether we are selling a good product or feeding children or building a well for clean water or ending polio — all of these things help other people. All of them help us to build connections, and to care for others.

When we think about our work in this way, it changes everything we do. It changes the way we approach our work and the way we treat other people. It helps us turn our thoughts away from ourselves and toward the good of others.

And this is how we build peace.

Every Rotary club around the world is an opportunity. It is an opportunity for the men and women of a community to share what they have. They share their time, their skills, their knowledge, and their resources.

The idea that together we can achieve is the fundamental idea of Rotary. We can do more together than we can do alone.

Together, we are powerful. And through Rotary, we have the power to change the world — now, and into the future.

We have the ability to build the world we dream of: one that is healthier, happier, and with hope for better things to come.

Almost 200 years ago, British statesman Edmund Burke said, “All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” History showed that he was correct. But it is equally true that when good people step forward to do good then good will triumph.

Rotary is a way for good people to step forward and work for a better world. It enables the men and women who care to act on their feelings. And it is a way for all of us, around the world, to transcend race, religion, nation, and politics, to come together to give help to the people who need it.

As Rotary president, I have had the privilege of seeing so much of this work. And it has made me prouder than ever to call myself a Rotarian.

Among the highlights of this Rotary year were the three peace forums we held, in Berlin, Honolulu, and Hiroshima. Every one of these events had great significance for me.

In Berlin, I saw the way that Germany, like Japan, built a peaceful future on a past of war. And in Honolulu and Hiroshima, I saw how even the deepest wounds can be healed by time and a shared commitment to peace.

I sometimes wonder what my grandparents would think if they saw Japan today, or the life that I now live.

So many things have changed since that day in August 1945, when we listened together to the radio. I do not think they could have imagined that, one day, no child in Japan would be hungry. Every child in Japan would go to school. And everyone in Japan would have clean water, good health care, and the chance for a happy life.

I am sure they would never have believed that all of this would happen in a Japan that had no national army, in a world where Japanese people are known for traveling not

with armies but with cameras.

And I cannot imagine what they would have thought if they had seen the peace forum in Honolulu, where I was welcomed, through Rotary, as a friend.

During the dark days of that long war, no one knew what the future would bring. But looking back at the terrible lessons of those years, I believe that we can say we learned them well.

Here in Lisbon, at this Rotary convention, we have the chance to experience the world as it could be: with people from every continent united to make their world a better place.

Here, we see how little our differences matter.

Here, we focus on what is truly important: what we can do to help others live better and happier lives.

My friends, I wish you all a wonderful convention. I am very proud to be here today with so many of you, celebrating this year of *Peace Through Service* together.

Thank you.