

2010 Bangkok Rotary Institute

Sat. 20th NOV. – 2:40-4:00PM

PANEL Topic: **“Building Communities, Bridging Continents”**

Moderator: *PRIVP Gary Huang; Panelists: RIVP Tom Thorfinnson, RID David Liddiatt, PRID Paul Netzel*

“Bridging Continents through Youth Programs”

by PRID Paul A. Netzel

Thank you PRIVP Gary ... and good afternoon my Rotary Friends. It is a pleasure to be among so many distinguished Rotary leaders & enthusiastic Members of the Family of Rotary! I am honored to have been invited by PRID and Institute Convener Jackson Hsieh to serve on this panel.

I have been a Rotarian enough years to have seen 42 RI Presidential themes. While each theme has carried important ideas for Rotarians, I believe RI President Ray's theme – **“Building Communities, Bridging Continents”** – is among THE BEST in capturing the essence of what Rotary is all about!

On Wednesday I had a opportunity to visit Chulalongkorn University – which is less than one kilometer from this hotel. I was most impressed.

Because “Chula” is the site for one of Rotary's six Centers for Peace and Conflict Resolution in the world and because the Peace Centers Program is TRF's #1 educational priority, I will focus my remarks on the inter-relationships between Rotary's commitment to Peace and Bridging Continents through its Youth Programs.

Imagine for a moment that when you return home after this Institute a reporter from your favorite news source gives you a call asking for a quote about Rotary, Peace and Youth.

The reporter says the story will have the headline: **“The 20th Century was the Bloodiest Century in Human History.”** The reporter will say that during the last Century an estimated 231 million people died as a result of what we call “politically caused” deaths. Of those deaths, 140 million were caused by wars and regional conflicts. The remaining 90 million deaths were a result of the consequences of wars and conflicts that led to mass starvations, genocides, and other deliberate acts.

The premise of the story is that we are entering the second decade of the 21st century, and yet this tragic pattern continues. In fact today there are some 30 countries engaged in armed conflicts or outright wars around the world.

The reporter then asks you: **“What is Rotary doing to advance peace in the world?”**

What would be your response?

You might first want to define Peace. For some, peace means the absence of warfare or military conflict. This type of peace is almost entirely in the hands of governments and related organizations.

Peace which comes from the elimination of military conflict usually is the result of peaceMAKERS and peaceKEEPERS of national and multi-national military forces.

But there is another kind of peace. For centuries great philosophers and statesmen have dreamed of a world at peace. Indeed, PEACE has been one Rotary's highest priorities from the time its earliest clubs were still in their infancy before World War I.

Rotarians have long talked about a world in which people could live together in tolerance and harmony. Such a society would respect all religious beliefs and not be disrupted by frictions based on color, race, cultures or ethnic backgrounds.

Such a society would actually care about other people – those who are sick, homeless, hungry, illiterate, as well as the disabled, the helpless and poverty stricken.

This kind of peace is more than the absence of hostilities. This kind of peace is the QUALITY of LIFE in which humans live.

Of course, this is why so many of the efforts of Rotarians are directed toward enhancing the quality of life in every corner of the globe.

- As Rotarians we know there will never be world Peace as long as there is widespread illiteracy and lack of education for everyone.

During Rotary's Convention in Montreal, Plenary Speaker Greg Mortensen said that **"We can drop bombs, we can put in electricity, we can build roads, we can put in computers. But if girls are not educated, society will never change,"** he added: **"In Africa as a child, I learned a proverb that says: "If we educate a boy, we educate an individual. But if we educate a girl, we educate a community."**

- Rotarians know there will never be a world at Peace as long as we have significant numbers of preventable diseases and illnesses.

Diane and I traveled to East Africa earlier this year with PRIP D.K. Lee and a group of his PDGs. One evening I asked a Rotarian why there were was peace in some African countries and such terrible conflicts in others. He said: **"It's simple! When people are hungry,**

sick and have no hope, they are willing to fight just to get a better life – as a result, war becomes inevitable.”

- **As Rotarians, we also know there will never be true Peace in the World as long as there is poverty.**

Another Rotarian in Africa said “... the keys to peace are the three B's – Bread, Bedding & Basic education.”

The good news is that Rotarians have been on the ground in most countries for a number of years, addressing many of the root causes of illiteracy, diseases and poverty.

And by using these *instruments of peace* such as food, clean water & sanitation, education, basic medical care – Rotary clubs and districts are *Building Communities and Bridging Continents*.

So how do Rotary's Youth Programs fit in? Programs such as Youth Exchange, RYLA, Interact, Rotaract, New Generations — are creating goodwill, peace and understanding among nations! They are Building Communities as well as Bridging Continents!

Rotary's Youth Exchange program is a great example. Since 1927 Rotary has worked with high school students and host families all over the world. To date more than 100,000 Rotary Youth Exchange students have lived with host parents in countries and continents far from their homelands.

We know that when Youth Exchange students go to a new country, they often experience a new language, a new culture, new foods, even new family traditions — *everything* is new to them. But they find out very quickly that their counterparts in their host families want the same things they do: to make the best out of life.

RYLA is another Rotary program that helps youth develop fundamentals of leadership, to understand the importance of ethics and integrity and to learn about problem solving and conflict management. All of these are essential if our youth are to succeed later in their personal lives and vocations.

In addition to what RYLA offers youth, Rotary's Interact, Rotaract and New Generations clubs are essential to Rotary's long term growth and vitality. The members of these clubs are Rotary's greatest assets. They provide energy and passion in building goodwill, world understanding and peace.

If anyone needs evidence, take a look in Eastern Russia (Siberia) where the Rotaract clubs are proving to be the catalyst to growth in Rotary thanks to the energy, excitement and dedication to service they are providing.

This underscores how Rotary's Youth Programs are among its greatest assets and are essential to Building Communities and Bridging Continents. This is why Rotary must do a better job of showcasing its Youth Programs.

One way for us to do so is rather than always describing Rotary as "an organization of 1.2 million Rotarians in 33,000 clubs" ... why not begin to say that Rotary is an organization of more than 1.6 million Rotarians and Youth in over 54,000 clubs in 200 countries and territories around the world!

By casting these bigger, better and bolder numbers – which are based in fact – we are portraying to the world and our own Rotarians a far more compelling perspective! In addition, we will greatly strengthen our bonds of inclusiveness with those involved in our Youth Programs.

I remember a few years ago then RIP Wilf Wilkinson reporting to us after visiting Iceland, the President of Iceland said to him: *"Rotary has the right answer. Your organization includes men and women on an equal basis, and you have members from countries who represent every race, color, and creed. So what the world must do is have MORE Rotarians."*

He was absolutely right.

Rotarians come in all sizes, shapes, races, creeds, skin-colors and lifestyles. They have differences of philosophy, religion, language, customs, and political orientation.

Even with all of these differences, Rotary has created a global organization committed to the friendship, cooperation and volunteer service, all of which can lead to peace.

And when it comes to making the case for Rotary's Youth Programs, PRIP and current Trustee-Chair Carl Wilhelm Stenhammar makes a powerful point when he often says: *"If we can make every single 17-year-old youth a Rotary Exchange Student, we would have no wars."*

I couldn't agree more!

In her book *"Words to Love By"* Mother Theresa said that the sum of all her work is only a drop in the ocean. *"But,"* she said, *"if I didn't put the drop in, the ocean would be one drop less."*

This tells me that we need to keep dropping into Rotary's programs as many youth as we can possibly touch.

Rotary has brought the world to the brink of being Polio free by one polio immunization at a time. So why can't we build goodwill and world peace through one matching grant at a time, or through one Youth Exchange Student or one Interact or Rotaract student or club at a time?

Rotary's Youth Programs are among its finest tools for peace – and for Building Communities and Bridging Continents.

Another tool is the Rotary Peace Centers program. During the 1980s Rotary began discussing the concept of a Paul Harris University! The idea evolved into the “Rotary Peace Centers” program for peace and conflict resolution.

Officially launched in 2002, the program enables Rotary to be even more strategic in its approach to building peace by training a new generation of peacemakers known as Rotary Peace Fellows.

The program provides academic and practical training to prepare scholars for leadership roles in solving conflicts around the world.

As many as 70 Fellows are selected every year in a globally competitive process to undertake one to two years of study at one of the six Rotary Peace Centers. Chulalongkorn offers a 3-month program in a “*certificate in peace & conflict studies*.” Each of the other five universities — located in Argentina, Australia, England, Japan and the US — offer Masters Degrees in the areas of International Relations, Public Administration, Mediation, Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution.

Already there are 642 Rotary Peace Fellows from nearly 100 countries working in professions dedicated to resolving conflicts and creating peace in some manner. Many are on the front lines with international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, think tanks, NATO, national governments, international NGOs & consulting firms.

In fact, tomorrow we will hear from an alumni of Chula's program.

I am convinced that Rotary's “peace makers” and “peace builders” will, over time, help reduce the chances for hostilities and create peace, especially in some of the most troubled parts of the world.

A priority of TRF Trustees is to raise US\$95-million by 2015 to permanently endow a minimum of 70 World Peace Fellows each year.

- **Earlier this year Trustees Chairman Carl-Wilhelm asked me to serve as the global chair for the Rotary Peace Centers Major Gifts Initiative.**
- **After five years since this initiative was launched, I am pleased to report that just over US\$50-million has been reported from outright gifts, pledges and even DDF funds. Some of the major donors are here in the audience today and I want to again thank you for your generosity.**

We know that living forever – in the physical sense – is not possible ... yet! But, each of us can leave a legacy that will live in perpetuity.

TRF's Permanent Fund enables Rotarians to create their own legacy to do good in the world forever.

If the concept of the Peace Centers program interests you, we hope that you might consider making a gift or a bequest through your estate plans to the program. And, if you have already made an unrestricted bequest to TRF Permanent Fund, you can still request that the proceeds be designated toward the Peace Centers program.

Once you have made your own commitment – perhaps you will help us identify one or two others whom you think might be interested in learning more about Peace Centers.

I would like to close by acknowledging PRIP Bhichai Rattakul, one of Rotary's most beloved past presidents. His theme during 2002-03 was: **"Sow the Seeds of Love."** He reminded us to *Sow the Seeds of Love* so that:

- ***"Where there is hunger, instead let there be food;***
- ***Where there is hatred, instead let there be love;***
- ***Where there is sorrow, let there be comfort; and,***
- ***Where there is war, instead let there be peace."***

It is my belief that if we are to Build Communities and Bridge Continents, we must begin by sowing the seeds of love through our youth. They represent 100 percent of the future of not only the world ... but of Rotary.

So as we talk about Bridging Continents through Rotary's Youth Programs let us remember that through our Youth Programs we are also "Sowing the Seeds of Peace."

Thank You.