

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE 65TH ROTARY INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT 3300 CONFERENCE

VENUE: SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 31 DEC 1999

TIME:

Firstly, let me thank Rotary International for inviting me today to deliver a speech. I understand participants come as far as Thailand, Taiwan, Amsterdam and India. To all foreign Rotarians here attending the 65th Rotary International District 3300 Conference, I bid you a warm 'Selamat Datang'. I hope you will take time off from your busy schedule to visit some of Malaysia's touristic spots and bring home with you good memories of Malaysian hospitality.

2. I understand that Rotary International, an organisation of business and professional leaders, with the objective of providing humanitarian service, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations and help build goodwill and peace, has played a vital role not only in fostering friendship and mutual understanding among the different communities in different countries around the world, but more importantly has succeeded in complementing Government efforts to create a friendly and cordial environment in ensuring peace and stability in the country. Internationally too this spirit of friendship has advanced international peace. Its mission of reducing differences among the different ethnic groups in the world has earned for itself a reputation for being a non-profit organisation that has transcended national boundaries and overcome language and the barriers of race, colour and creed while at the same time advancing international understanding, goodwill and peace among the different communities in the world. Rotary's motto 'Service Above Self' is consistent with the spirit of altruism propagated by most religions of the world, and today Rotary embraces some 1.2 million men and women from more than 162 countries and regions providing humanitarian service to mankind.

3. Rotary International District 3300's contribution to Malaysia can hardly be over emphasised. The most significant contribution has been its avoidance of involvement in partisan politics. This has helped Malaysia attain its objective of creating a society predicated on the principles of harmonious living. Being apolitical, Rotary International has discharged

its duties and responsibilities to the Malaysian community without stirring any ill feelings among the various racial groups or political factions. Being non partisan, non prejudiced and non discriminating has earned for itself high regard as a truly professional NGO. Its commitment, dedication and especially its caring and selfless attitude deserves commendation of the highest order. I especially wish to single out its enthusiasm to venture into community service, providing projects and programmes that have helped to lessen the burden of the underprivileged and the less fortunate in Malaysian society. Their mission to reach out to society's poor despite the economic downturn is most praise worthy. The Malaysian Government therefore wish to place on record its appreciation to Rotary International for its contribution to Malaysia. This is especially remarkable as such services were made without the imposition of preconditions, or the expectation of any rewards. I hope other NGOs will emulate this non-partisan role and the excellent show of deeds of Rotary International. By being responsible and totally committed towards peace, it has advanced the ideals of excellent citizenship. Peace, understanding and goodwill among its citizens are important prerequisites for the achievement of a good quality of life.

4. The world today is fraught with problems including that of war, famine and poverty. The destruction brought about by war, civil strife and conflicts has led to millions of children to live in abject poverty, made worse by the prevalence of life threatening diseases such as Aids, HIV, etc. The humanitarian approach of Rotarian International in providing community service worldwide, has helped to alleviate some of these miseries and sufferings in the world today. Let us hope this spirit of friendship among the numerous communities worldwide will further promote world peace and understanding, making it a better place for all of us.

5. Soon we will leave this millennium for a new one, a time which promises great hope and aspirations for all, irrespective of race, colour, beliefs or religion. The future is not without challenges as we know the pace of technological change, the borderlessness of nations and the ever increasing flow of information technology will have great impact on our lives . The new era brings with it changes that will require us to adapt swiftly so as to effectively reap enormous benefits. In this context, it is important that Malaysians be ready and responsive to these changes. The rich, the poor, the fortunate and the less fortunate must be given the opportunity to equal access to this modern technology and infrastructure. The

spirit of Rotary should influence us in the development of an equitable and just world.

6. The years ahead will be daunting but I believe that with the bonds of friendships and the willingness to serve others, Rotarians worldwide will help us make a good start in the new millennium.

7. To all Rotarians here I wish them a great New Year, a new Century and a new millennium. May God bless you all.