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SPEECH BY  
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DATIN SERI DR SITI HASMAH BTE HAJI MOHD ALI  
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE  
R.I. DISTRICT 3300  
AT ISTANA HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR  
ON SATURDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 1997  
AT 10.00 A.M.  
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May the Blessings of Peace be upon you and a very good morning.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks for the honour you have given me to officiate at the Opening Ceremony of R.I District 3300 this morning.

2. Secondly, I would still be flying home from Japan after APEC meeting in Canada and therefore not able to present my speech personally. So I apologize and hope you will accept my personal representative who will read my speech on my behalf.

3 The activities of Rotary Clubs in providing services and assistance are well known and because of these involvement with the community that people availed themselves to become useful members of the Rotary. This has been the case in my own family where my late father, my husband and my brother became Rotarians and supported its objectives and ideals.

4. I was informed that my late father was the only person who was loaned and held the classification of Religion - Islam in the Rotary Club of Kuala Lumpur at that time. I do not know what that means. I can only guess that it must have been difficult to invite Malay members then, especially when he held the position of the President of the Religious Affairs in Selangor.

5. I therefore congratulate District Governor Beh Lye Huat for achieving success in increasing the members of Lady Rotarians and Rotarians from among the Malay and Muslim Communities. A

multiracial component in any organisation is always an asset, as will be seen when implementing Community Projects.

6. At the time of Independence in 1957, the Government's top priority was to develop the rural areas where poverty, ill-health, illiteracy and apathy existed. These 4 evil problems were inter-related and the a nations's development hampered if they were not attended to immediately and rapidly.

7. Tun Abdul Razak's Red Book was the bible in our National Rural Development Programmes, be it social, economic or psychological. At that time, child diseases like Diphtheria, Whooping Cough, Tetanus, Tuberculosis, Malaria, Poliomyelitis were killers. Our mortality statistics among children and mothers were so high that unless the Government addressed the issue immediately with health education, extended rural health services, poverty eradication and formal and informal education, the situation would have worsened.

8. I was one of those officers blessed with the opportunity to provide health services particularly in the rural areas. We would hand in all the Government programmes : immunisation, applied nutrition, prevention of infectious diseases, Malaria Eradication Programme, care of Ante natal mothers, especially those of high-risk, family spacing and many more. By the time I left Kedah, it was with deep satisfaction that the people had chosen to accept Government's health programmes and had benefitted from them.

9. The success of our health programmes showed in our Vital Statistics, especially, the mortality rates amongst mothers and children. Our immunisation programme against killer diseases attained more than 95 percent coverage. Our last case of Polio was in 1986. We were also in the consolidated phase in Malaria eradication programme in mid 1970s.

10. Unfortunately, with increased population mobility and migration there seems to be a re-emergence and return of certain diseases, especially of Malaria and Tuberculosis which defied the medicines for treatment against them in the 1970's.

11. The Rotary's Global Polio-Plus Programme to eradicate polio by year 2005 is laudable. No Government agencies nor the UN alone could eradicate effectively diseases from the face of this Earth. The involvement of Rotary therefore is very commendable and will have a far reaching effect.

12. I feel very happy and assured that District 3300 is particularly active in campaigning for an ASEAN Polio-Free region. Your contribution will be an invaluable gift to the children of this region and of the world. We should also think about other diseases which have been mentioned earlier.

13. In February, this year, the World Summit on Micro-Credit System in Washington urged nations to seriously plan for the eradication of poverty amongst its poor in the rural areas. The target was 70 million homes by the year 2010.

14. I understand that the Rotary Inter President Glen Kinross has urged all 1.2 million around the globe to translate the Rotary theme of "Show Rotary Cares" into actions and deeds. He has specifically singled out the eradication/alleviation of poverty as an important action for Rotarians.

15. As again in health issues the poverty problem is very close to my heart. It is inter-related with a person's attitude and daily life. A poverty-stricken family will have very low attitude and indifference towards improving its condition. There will be insufficient food for the family because they do not have money; bad and neglected nutrition expose them to ill-health; poor education prevent them from getting employed except to work their own fields until they become too weak and subsequently die! This vicious cycle goes on unless the bends and the cycle of

poverty is broken.

16. As President of the International Steering Committee (ISC) for the Economic Advancement of Rural and Island women and Chairperson of the Regional Steering Committee for Asia-Pacific, (RSC-AP) I also like to urge Rotarians to assist those countries which have a very large percentage of rural population and are poverty-stricken.

17. We have come to believe that the micro-credit programmes are essential in assisting poor families out of their situation and lead a better life for themselves and their families. The ISC and RSC-AP First Ladies are an advocacy group urging Governments and policy-makers to commit themselves to the alleviation of poverty and that the Micro-Credit Programmes and establishment of Micro-Finance Institutions are proposed.

18. As in Bangladesh, Malaysia has Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (A.I.M) as a replication of the Grammen Bank Scheme. There are now 46,000 rural women members of AIM and are successful in lifting themselves above the poverty level of RM480.00 per month per family to more than RM1,500/- a month. Some have even become successful businesswomen with involvement of family members. We have found that the micro-credit programmes do not only help the borrowers financially but also give them the self-esteem and confidence to lead better lives for themselves and their families.

19. Husbands joined in helping their wives to establish contact to market their products. The transportation and marketing of goods are the men's responsibilities but the financial and production matters are still with the women. Records have shown in all micro-credit programmes in every country in Asia-Pacific that the women folks are very good paymasters. They know exactly what to do with the loans and 99.9 percent of them pay back.

20. I am happy that the Rotary Clubs here in Malaysia are having "partnerships in enterprise (P.I.E) programmes for petty traders and cottage-industry operators. Globally, nations are encouraged to establish their own Trust Fund from which micro-credit programmes can be assisted. The world needs to address the hard-core poor and the impoverished as a priority. Financing from various sources to help them will not be difficult if and when Governments and their leaders commit themselves to sincerely and seriously face the problem and will political support to overcome it.

21. While we lament over the lack of resources to help the poor and needy, the U.N. Document E/1989/72 states that "the monetary value of traffic in the illicit drugs throughout the world is now estimated to be second only to that of trade in armaments. "As human beings, we are shocked as we grasp its great significance. We can do no less than regard it as an indictment of the whole modern-day human civilisation. Yes the two major expenditures of the whole human race are geared towards destruction and self-destruction.

22. Yet ironically, almost all the countries of the world - developed or developing bemoan the skewed reality that they are short of funds and resources for prevention and development. On the other hand, illicit drug traffickers have become so powerful with their ill-gotton gains that now they have the brazen audacity of offering to pay national debts in return for the government's favour to condone their crimes. U.N. has conservatively estimated that the illicit trade in drugs is between US\$400 - US\$500 billion dollars a year or roughly equivalent to 10 percent of total International trade.

23. Collectively as God Almighty's vice-roys on this earth, have we as human beings taken leave of our senses? Through our acts of commission and more damagingly through our acts of omission we have encouraged and condoned the wrong and sinful priorities of our modern world.

24. To Quote the late Rev. Martin Luther King "What disturbs me is not the noise and clamour, and violence of the bad people in our society, but the appalling silence of the good people".

25. Ironically our region bears the brunt of the curse of these misplaced priorities. South-West Asia is the World's second largest purchaser of armaments second only to the Middle East Nations. Like the illicit drug trade, demand encourages supply and supply generates demand and so the vicious circle grows.

26. A further ugly side of the scenario is staring us in the face. As is to be expected, superpower manufacturers of armament, weapons and land mines have the audacity to defy world opinion and what is more get away with it. How civilised, how humane, how democratic and how caring are we?

27. I am given to understand that The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International is the world's largest private foundation that is dedicated to the promotion of world understanding and peace.

28. This being so and that Rotary Clubs by and large are urban based service organisations, I wish to suggest that Rotary devotes its collective resources and wisdom to provide peace education for children and the new generation, with particular emphasis on under-privileged and marginalised urban children.

29. Let us invest in the future. Inculcate the importance of peace, non-violence, neighbourliness, love and mutual respect in the minds of our new generation. Promote freedom from fear and want. Ensure the growing environment is free from prejudice, hate, violence and crime. Nurture and exemplify harmonious living in understanding, dignity and peace.

30. I hope Rotarians will show that Rotary Cares for Peace and for the Future. With this hope, I declare this R.I District 3300

Conference officially open. May the Almighty bless us with his guidance.

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