

Penyampai : DATIN SERI DR. SITI HASMAH BINTI HAJI MOHD. ALI  
Tajuk : THE GOVERNOR'S BANQUET OF ROTARY INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT 3300  
Lokasi : SHANGRILA HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR  
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When I was first informed that I was to receive a Rotary International Award, I said that I had already been given one in August 1993. Yes, they said, but that was Paul's. This is Jean's, and for the first non-Rotarian woman!

2. How "non-Rotarian" can I be? With a Rotarian father, Rotarian husband, Rotarian brother and an Hon: Rotarian daughter, doesn't this make me a Rotarian automatically unofficially? The rules say "no".

Membership does not rub off that easily from family members nor is it inherited! So I am still qualified as a "non-Rotarian" for the Award.

3. Next, comes the gender qualification why to a woman and not to a man? There may have been Jean Harris award to a gentleman before, I don't know, but I do appreciate that Rotary is sensitised to gender issues, especially when non-gender sensitisation and discrimination were quite the norm in the old days. I am proud to be the first woman to be honoured.

4. I have every reason to be happy and proud tonight because I am indeed honoured to accept this Award on behalf of all the women who have spent their lifetime working in the fields, looking after their families under very poor environmental circumstances and yet proud to have done so on their own. I pay tribute also to the women who gave their services caring for the mothers and children in the rural areas so that they would all live a better and healthy life.

5. These two categories of women have spent endless hours doing what they have to do to keep themselves and the community alive, and they have been successful.

6. In Washington D.C, Malaysia has been identified and recognised as the most successful developing country to have implemented Safe Motherhood Initiative Programmes for the past 10 years. Our mothers are guaranteed of antie-natal care, delivery services and post-natal care of the highest quality. Our Maternal Mortality Ratio has come down from 240 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1980 to only 20 in 1997.

7. Where children are concerned, Malaysia's immunisation programme goes beyond the WHO's required percentage. Over 95% of our infants are covered by the Ministry of Health Immunisation programme, including anti Polio drops. BCG has eradicated T.B., meningitis among kids, the triple antigen against Diphtheria, whooping cough and Tetanus protected them from these killer diseases so rampant in the 1950s and 60s. Anti- Polio vaccine was introduced as an injection in the 1960s with very bad side-effects until the Anti-Polio drops were introduced and accepted well by parents and infants. By 1987 Polio was eradicated in Malaysia although in the early 1990s, two cases were reported among a community group which regarded immunisation as unessential and unimportant. They learnt their lesson.

8. Although our immunisation programme is successful, we have to still be vigilant about these 5 killing diseases of children, especially at this time when the influx of people from other countries is rapidly taking place. It is organisations like the Rotary that can assist to make Immunisation Programmes a continuous programme for the health of our young generation. I would also like to suggest that Service Clubs and Corporate entities not only provide services and funds for children's health programmes but also to focus their attention on mothers globally who are in need of safe delivery and care before and after pregnancy so that Safe Motherhood Initiative Programmes would be more meaningful and a reality.

9. I thank the Rotary International District 3300 for this honour of being the first recipient of the Jean Harris Award. It is a fine tribute to those who worked with me the past 40 years.