

4 November 2006

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the Rotary International Day at the United Nations**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Warmest greetings to you all

I am pleased to join you today on the occasion of Rotary International's Day at the United Nations. Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, Rotary has been an invaluable partner. You have worked hand in hand with the United Nations to meet some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

The work and support of organizations such as Rotary helped make the Millennium Development Goals a central part of the 2000 Millennium Declaration.

Six years on, we need to keep the momentum going in order to achieve these Goals by 2015.

It is timely that you are focusing on access to water and health today. These issues have moved up the political agenda recently. They are indispensable to sustainable development and human security.

It is estimated that from 1990 to 2004, 1.2 billion people in the developing world gained access to water and sanitation. However, to reach our Goals for 2015, an additional 300 million should already have had access.

To achieve this we need urgent action through global partnerships involving Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and the private sector.

I commend Secretary-General Kofi Annan for initiating the United Nations Global Compact as an inclusive mechanism to encourage broad partnerships.

Rotary has an exceptional track record in this area; from your dedication to humanitarian work to your historic commitment to immunize all of the world's children against polio.

As we now know, many of today's life threatening experiences could be easily prevented. This is a powerful reminder that together we can deliver life changing results.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The involvement of the private sector is vital.

I am glad to note that corporate social responsibility is a growing agenda.

Rotary's global membership includes many leaders from the corporate world. Your organization can play an important role in promoting this agenda.

For example, collaborations to bridge the digital divide among non-governmental organizations, the private sector and national governments have made a significant impact.

Through partnerships with NGOs, information technology corporations now donate or sell equipment at much lower prices, thus providing more access to technology for poor populations and in remote areas. Governments in turn can play an active role by supporting these efforts.

The poor and other marginalized groups should also have a voice in these initiatives. By involving them and catering to their needs, poverty eradication programmes have a much greater chance of succeeding.

Empowering women and young people is also imperative. Increasing the voice women have in policy making is critical if we are to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals.

It comes as no surprise that 145,000 Rotarians are women.

We also have to ensure that today's younger generations have the knowledge, opportunities and leadership to build on and take forward our shared Goals. I commend Rotary's youth exchange program for developing global awareness and understanding amongst young people.

Acknowledging the richness of cultural and spiritual traditions is essential if we are to develop a global society committed to peace and equal justice for all. When we come together to affirm universal values - the founding principles of the United Nations - we discover a common language.

Rotary has always embraced this philosophy, through its global membership, which continues to unite people of all faiths and backgrounds. Even in times of war, Rotarians have maintained their efforts on behalf of international understanding and cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the Sixty-first Session of the General Assembly, I will convene a series of thematic debates on development, gender and the dialogue among civilizations.

The first debate is scheduled for 27 November. It will focus on the progress made so far to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; identify obstacles that threaten their achievement; and explore innovative solutions to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015.

I look forward to your full participation.

As the United Nations defines its role in the twenty-first century, its relationship with organizations and friends like Rotary International will be a source of strength and inspiration.

Thank you.