

## **Cultivating Peace: A Vision Shared by Rotary/UNESCO**

Rotary International President Kalyan Banerjee and over 300 rotarians coming from France, other European countries, Africa and USA, have participated at a conference on Peace on 17 March 2012 held at the UNESCO Headquarter in Paris.

During the opening session, Genc Seiti, UNESCO Director of National Commissions and Civil Society announced the recent decision of UNESCO DG Irina Bokova and the UNESCO Executive council to admit Rotary International in its higher level of recognition, with the associate status.

In his address, Past RI Vice President, Serge Gouteyron, current RI Primary Representative to UNESCO, reminded participants that a Rotary UNESCO conference "Action for Water" was organized in May 2006 in the same location with RI President Carl Wilhelm Stenhammar. This conference prefigured the new strategic partnership signed between the Rotary Foundation of RI and the UNESCO IHE Institute for Water Education.

This time, the conference theme was larger: « Cultivating peace »

Bernard Dervaux, past RI representative to UNESCO and past chairman of Water without Border, moderated the first session. The topic of the session was "Water and Peace"

The panel included Ron Denham, chairman of WASRAG, Benjamin Noury from Oxyo-water, András Szöllösi Nagy Rector UNESCO IHE Institute for Water Education who came with two students from Uruguay and Rwanda and Jean Michel Bécavin RRFC zone 11.

During the session topics included rotarians awareness of the social issue of Safe Water, an overview of the ponds in the world which are cause for conflict, the important part play by the UNESCO IHE Institute for Water Education with the training each year of 170 ingeniers on Water issues and the strategic partnership signed between the Rotary Foundation of RI and the UNESCO IHE. Through the partnership, the Foundation will offer packaged global grants that Rotary clubs may use to select and sponsor scholarships for professionals in the water sector. Up to eight students, a year may be chosen for any of three master of science programs at the institute in Delft, the Netherlands.

The second session on "Education and Peace" was moderated by Cyril Noirtin, RI Representative to UNESCO and former member of the TRF Rotary Peace Center Committee.

The topic included educational programs of Rotary and UNESCO with an highlight on the Rotary Peace Center Program.

The panel included Past RI Director Carlo Monticelli, Mark Richmond, UNESCO Director, Division of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development

Andrezza Zeitune, Rotary Peace Fellow and working today at UNESCO.

This session highlighted the closeness of Rotary and UNESCO Goals through their educational program with a special focus on literacy and the education of girls.

Andrezza Zeitune through her field experience gained at the Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand gave an emotional address on the child at risk in Thailand.

In prelude to the session on cultivating peace, Joelle Chauvain, past president of the Rotary club of Paris, gave a keynote on sustainable development application in the architecture area with an example of the new building tower in Europe's number 1 business district Paris La Défense.

In the session on cultivating Peace, Mrs Belinda Preiz who at the last minute replaced, Mr. Hans d'Orville, UNESCO Assistant Director-General Bureau of Strategic Planning reminded participants that Rotary and UNESCO have common goals through parallel ways.

*"Peace is there... it does exist. And in my view, it is possible to obtain peace, perhaps even lasting peace – at least periodically- if each and every one of us is willing to give it, to share it, as indeed nobody owns peace in his or her own right... Achieving peace is one of the most beautifully rewarding collective exercises that we can engage in, it is by definition an exercise in the plural, but it begins in each of our minds, by a choice. It is here, as UNESCO's Constitution says, that "The defenses of peace must be constructed". I am profoundly pleased by this joint research venture, which shapes itself between UNESCO and Rotary. Two Partners, a parallel line of thought. In advancing together, we will seek to share peace as an important prerequisite for making choices, but choices based on mutual trust, confidence and a sense responsibility because it is this that paves the way for also making good choices "*

Rotary International President Kalyan Banerjee emphasises that Rotarians through their daily projects, their tendency, their generosity and testimony, are opening the path to a better life : the definition of Peace through service.

*"We are able to go to the places where people are struggling just to survive, and we do what we can to help them struggle a bit less. And whether that means clean water and better sanitation, or educational programs, or any one of our sustainable humanitarian projects – we are indeed building peace."*

*"My friends, Rotary does build peace. We do it not with armies, not with peace treaties, not with debates or elections or governments. Rotary builds peace in a much more real, much more practical way – day by day, individual by individual, with every act of service by every single Rotarian."*

An open forum allowed Rotarians to ask question and exchange ideas with the RI Presidents and the Directors of UNESCO. It highlighted how much cultivating peace was a unifying and dynamic theme for Rotarians.

In his closing remark, Serge Gouteyron reminded that in 1942, Rotary clubs from 21 nations organized a conference in London to develop a vision for advancing education, science, and culture after World War II. That event was a precursor to UNESCO. In 1945, 49 Rotarians went to San Francisco to help draft the UN Charter.

Serge also highlighted the role of the team of Rotarians appointed by the RI President as representatives to UN bodies and nongovernmental organizations worldwide.

He also noted the convergence goals between Rotary, private service organization and UNESCO Intergovernmental organization as opening opportunities for potential joint projects.