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Rotary International 2002-2003

Avoidable Blindness

"Next to life itself, God's most precious gift is sight - Protect it, Save it, Restore it."

Task Force

From Darkness To Light: Multi District Workshop on Avoidable Blindness Held at Goa, Oct 4th and 5th

Contributed by Rekha Shetty
 ABTF Coordinator, Zone 6

The extravagant visual beauty of sun, sand, green palms and dazzling array of flowers poignantly reminded delegates of the real tragedy of blindness. The seminar on Avoidable Blindness for Zone 6 at the Goan Beach Resort in the aristocratic Cidade De Goa on 4th and 5th of October was a journey from darkness to light.

It started on the 4th, with an exciting cruise on the river Mandovi. After meeting at the Emerald Lawns, the delegates danced to a live band on the balmy, moonlit deck of the noble cruiser. Fellowship reached new heights as the boat sailed into the calm ocean and the panoramic view of Goa receded into the night. And I thought, Rotary is like that ship, a whole happy world, a family bonded together with memories of friendship and service.

Next day, it was down to business. Milton wrote about the beauty of this world with the inner vision of his blind eyes. Helen Keller, blind from birth, when asked to comment said that the greatest tragedy worse than blindness is **to have eyes and not see**. Those at the seminar, left with the gift of inner vision to the problems of Avoidable Blindness.

The room was as dark as the darkest night and the 175 participants from 12 Districts in South East Asia were blind-folded with black and red silk eye masks.



ROTARY CLUB OF MAPUCA – LEAVING BEHIND FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS OF TIME !

The gentle voice of Annette Lakshmi wrapped in silken live music spoke straight to the heart as each of us experienced for a few minutes the dark world of the blind. Helen Keller, blind, deaf and mute, spoke to us in the darkness. *"The public must learn that the blind man is not a genius . . . nor a freak . . . nor an idiot. He has a mind that can be educated, . . . a hand that can be trained, for him to strive, to realise. And it is the duty of the public to help him make the best of himself so that he can win light through work."*

The multi-district conference on Avoidable blindness threw light on the solutions to prevent 15 million people from becoming blind in India.

The idea of having this multi district seminar came, in early July when PDG Rekha Shetty was invited to install the President of Rotary Club of Mapusa, Mahendra Gupta. Pres. Mahendra Gupta happened to be the largest manufacturer of eyeglass lenses in India. He too, like



LET THE LIGHT SHINE FORTH ! THE HON'BLE CHIEF MINISTER INAUGURATING THE SEMINAR BY LIGHTING THE TRADITIONAL LAMP !

PDG Rekha Shetty had been inspired by PRIP. Frank Devyln's vision.

The focus was Action. Three "Do it Today kits" were given to each participant to enable them to take action on:

- Preventing blindness in children
- Conducting cataract surgery operations
- Preventing the permanent blindness

caused by glaucoma

The conference was addressed by distinguished personalities, the Chief Minister of Goa, Manohar Parrikar, the Health Minister of Goa, Dr Suresh Amonkar. Both pledged concrete action to achieve Vision for all by 2020. The famous eye surgeon Dr. Badrinath of Sankara Netralaya, gave a scintillating address on the Avoidable Blindness scenario in India. The Rotary Club of Mapuca honoured him by making him a Paul Harris Fellow.

The prime movers of the Vision 2020 were Chairman DGN Dilip R Salgoacar and the largest manufacturer of eye glass lenses in India, President Mahendra Gupta, ably assisted by the dynamic Rotary Club of Mapuca. As Convenor of the workshop, I reminded Rotarians of their heritage of greatness:

"They said Man could never fly like a bird, remembering tragic Icarus. Orville Wright initiated the history of human flight. He was a Rotarian. They said Man could never scale Everest, till Sir Edmund Hillary proved them wrong. He was a Rotarian. They said the Moon is a mystery. Frank Borman on the first manned flight round the moon, carried the Rotary flag. He was a Rotarian. Today, many say 45 million people are blind. We at this international conference, 175 leaders together say, that they can have sight. For we are Rotarians!"

The next conference will be held on 18th and 19th January 2003 at Kuala Lum-

pur. This Pan Asian event will be organised by Rtn. S Kulasegaran, Chairman, Management Committee, Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital. It promises to be a wonderful event on the eve of the region's most beautiful harvest festival – Thai Poosam.

The Malaysian Conference will be jointly organised by three groups: The Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital (Thoneh); The Six Rotary Clubs of Group 7 in District 3300 namely, Rotary Clubs of Kuala Lumpur DiRaja, Kuala Lumpur North, Kuala Lumpur West, Kampung Baharu, Pantai Valley and Putrajaya for and on behalf of District 3300; and Rotavision and Zone Coordinator for Avoidable Blindness, PDG Rekha Shetty. Please make plans to attend.

RESOLUTIONS adopted at the Multi-District Seminar on "Avoidable Blindness" held on Saturday 5th October, 2002 at Hotel Cidade De Goa.

Resolution No.1

This Conference adopts formation of Body of Rotarians which shall hereafter be called as "ROTA VISION 2020" with aims and objectives as given hereunder:

1. Increasing access to information that can prevent blindness through existing health care organisations.
2. Promoting regular screening of school children to prevent low vision and blindness in children. Failure to identify eye problems can lead to a life of poor performance and misery for children.
3. Provide inexpensive methods of screening for schools and populations with little access to eye care.
4. Promote programmes for training Doctors in the latest techniques in eye care, so that primary Physicians can identify the problems at an early stage.
5. Organising mothers against blindness.
6. Organising safe cataract surgeries with rigorous follow-up.
7. Initiate action to take surgical inter-

*"The
focus was
Action"*



For an update on the 'Zanzibar Vision 2002' Project, go to the following website:

<http://hem.passagen.se/luma/zanzibar2002.htm>



DGN DILIP SALGOACAR, PDG RAJENDRA M DOSHI, PDG REKHA SHETTY & PP.JAI SHETTY POSING WITH THE PAINTING "GIFT OF VISION" BY GOAN PAINTER JUSTIN LOBO

From Darkness to Light (*continued*)

ventions to the door- steps of the urban and rural poor.

Resolution No. 2

This Conference resolves to observe Fortnight of every year from 1st August to 15th August as " Free from Blindness Mission" and the last date of the fortnight i.e. 15th August is to be celebrated as "Free from Blindness Day."

Resolution No. 3

This Conference also adopts Resolution exhorting all the Rotary Clubs, Rotarians, Inner Wheel Members, Rotaracts, Interractors to involve themselves wholeheartedly in promoting aims and objectives of ROTAVISION 2020 , and in particular areas :

- To promote Gift of Vision Globally as a micro-level method to combat blindness. Organise support through matching grants to strengthen existing infrastructure.
- To undertake mass screening of public above 50 years of age to identify their requirements for better vision.
- To set up spectacle banks in every club to collect and distribute used eye glasses.
- To provide referral transport for the rural blind, when required to city centres.
- To persuade Doctors, Ophthalmologists and Eye Hospitals to provide free or subsidised services to combat blindness. Every District should maintain a Directory of these Professionals and Hospitals.
- Organise awareness Seminars on Avoidable Blindness in all Rotary Clubs

and making it part of the Agenda at every Conference.

- To ensure networking of all Rotary Clubs across borders in this endeavor. - To create team of Ophthalmic Professionals to travel to distant areas and countries where facilities are not yet developed. Train-

ing local Doctors in those areas to achieve excellence.

- To persuade every Rotary Clubs and District to have an Avoidable Blindness Chair. Rotarian shall network with Government Organisations and NGOs to improve the services geared to prevent and cure blindness.
- Rotarians of ROTAVISION 2020 will continue to keep the topic of Avoidable Blindness high on Rotary International's Menu of Services.
- Rotarians shall work with RI to pay special attention to generating vital cooperation with UN Bodies, Private Charitable Bodies and NGOs for mobilisation of technical and financial resources.
- ROTAVISION 2020 will continuously work on communication material to improve understanding and awareness of Avoidable Blindness Issues.

Resolution No. 4

The Government should be approached to consider reimbursement of expenses for Glaucoma screening and surgical expenses.

Resolution No. 5

It was resolved that every Rotary Club will undertake to carry out cataract operations, minimum 50 per Club and 5,000 per District under the Avoidable Blindness programme.

Earlier this year, I was invited to Alaska to speak at their District Conference. There at PDG Alana Berg's residence I met an Indian friend from the College Alaska Rotary Club. He was Dr. Sathy A Naidu, a distinguished Professor from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. He worked hard to set up a joint Avoidable Blindness project in his native seaside town of Vishakapatnam, India. Today, the Rotary Netra Eye Hospital is a testimony to his work. People across the Globe who see this, please contact us for wonderful projects to give the gift of vision to the rural poor in Asia. Rotary creates a global network of caring.

Rotary Club of Nairobi Focuses on Eye Health

The Rotary Club of Nairobi (RCN) is the oldest Club in District 9200 having received its Charter on September 7th, 1930. Some of the major projects include Jacaranda School for Mentally Challenged (St. Nicholas School for Handicapped-1949) and advising and encouraging formation of Nairobi National Park, a Wild Life Reserve, in the 1950's.

CARE has been the Torch that RCN has borne over the years; Health, Water, the Environment, and Education have been important areas where RCN Rotarians have devoted time and generated funds to support these efforts. In the area of Health RCN has directed efforts towards Aids treatment and prevention Aids Orphans, Polio Eradication, Malaria Prevention through Education and Avoidable Blindness amongst others.

The later has befitting on 2 fronts; Improved water quality results in improved health and reduces Eye problems by 40% over a span of 5 to 10 years. RCN has sponsored water projects under 3 H and matching grants with clubs from Europe and North America in past 3 years, valued at about USD 300,000; to provide Clean Water available to various Communities in Kenya.

On the Second front, it has carried out 3 eye camps in past 2 years in western Kenya at Eldoret Hospital. 2 camps were in February and June, 2001 when 150 and 140 IOL surgeries were carried out. Similarly 150 surgeries were in May 2002. RCN members provided logistic and screening support. Surgeries were carried by a team of Ophthalmologists lead by Dr. Mukesh Joshi and Dr. Dunera Ilako from RC Nairobi, Dr. Mrs. Wanjiku

Mathenge from Nakuru and Dr Jory Odeda & DR. Claudio Owino from Eldoret assisted by their support staff. Funds for these camps were arranged through friends of Rotary.

RCN initiated IOL surgeries beginning in 1983 and about 7000 men, women and children, have benefited from these efforts. RCN is providing leadership and guidance for proposed Eye camps in February 2003 to coincide with the Presidential Conference (February 21-23, 03). Surgeries are planned at Kikiyu Eye Clinic 600 and Lions SightFirst Hospital 400, a total of 1000 in the month of February 2003. The later will be First such project jointly conducted by Rotary International and Lions International. Rotary surgeons from USA, India and Kenya expected to participated and 3 districts from USA, 2 Districts from Europe and District 9200 are providing support through a Matching Grant. Some of this support is in kind, surgical materials and services at both clinics and materials from D 1010. This will be one of the important events during the visit of RI President Bichai Rattakul.

Further surgeries are planned before June 2003; First, a Matching Grant 18170 for USD 40,000 with RCN and RC Seoul and other Korean clubs and second, a Matching Grant of USD 14,000 in which Bombay -RC Bandra and RCN & RC Machakos will be sponsoring. RCN and Kenya Rotarians expect to continue provide communities with genuine **CARE and Service above self to Sow Seeds of Love.**

Rotary International District 3300

Announces

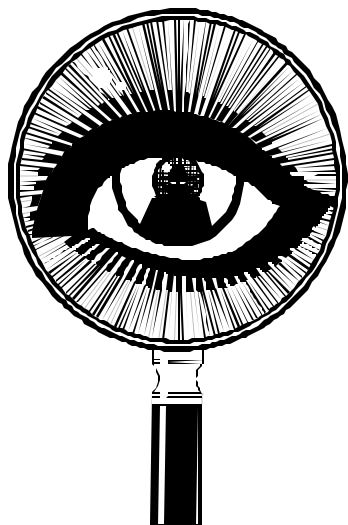
THE AVOIDABLE BLINDNESS CONFERENCE OF ASIA

January 18th-19th 2003

Kuala Lumpur

Organized by

- The Tun Hussein Onn National Eye Hospital; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- The Group 7 Clubs of District 3300; and
- Rotavision 2020 (Rotary International Zone 6)



Good News

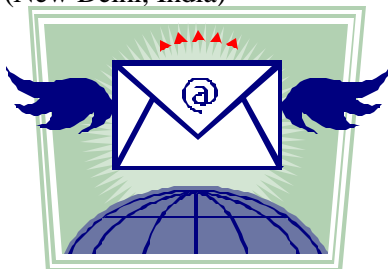
29 October 2002

Dear PDG Rtn Dr Prithvi Raval,

At the outset, kindly accept our compliments and congratulations for creating required awareness on the subject of Rotary's Avoidable Blindness Project through the ever increasing net work of Rotary e-mail groups. We have time and again noted and reported in our Club Bulletin District-wise that the persistent efforts of PRIP Rtn Frank J Devlyn to "create awareness" have inspired and motivated all of us to "take action". We feel proud that you are successfully carrying forward the "Rotary e-mail torch" you lit for the Barcelona Convention disseminating information throughout the Rotary world, further for projects!

Sir, we are happy to inform that we have on 28th October 2002 (yesterday) completed hundred (100) "Eye Donation Pledge forms" consisting of all our 38 members, family and friends (which we started two months ago). Nevertheless, the motivation and encouragement came from your e-mails. Pl keep it up. Also, "Hurrah" to our PRIP Rtn Frank Devlyn, an undisputed and dynamic leader of the Rotary World as well as the world community of the downtrodden and needy, who "cares" for them and who toils for them "above self".

Kindest Rotary regards,
(AC Peter)
President, Rotary Club of Noida
City, Dist 3010
(New Delhi, India)



Guerrero, Let There Be Light Project Page 5

*Contributed by Mark B. Ruleman
Memphis Rotary Club*

Many can imagine a grandmother's joy seeing her grandchild for the first time. Few can truly appreciate that joy knowing that the family lives together and only hearing each other for years due cataract blindness keeping them from her precious sight. The avoidable blindness of cataracts, opaqueness of the eye's lens, is a major cause of loss of sight resulting in over 25 million individuals worldwide being plunged into the correctable dark.

The *Guerrero, Let There Be Light Project* is an opportunity to remove the curtains that obscure vision by working with government and private citizens. Rotary International has seen this effort as a unique and effective way to provide sight saving surgeries where few have cared before.

In partnership with the World Cataract Foundation (WCF), based in Memphis, Tennessee, the government of Mexico has formed an agreement to make Guerrero, a southwestern state of Mexico, a cataract free zone. 50,000 surgeries over the next ten years represent a project of sight providing scope never before embraced and Rotarians are there from across the globe. Training and supplies are essential in the furthering of this multi-million-dollar effort. Plans to develop more eye clinics are on the drawing board.

Some Rotarians of special note must include the 5 clubs of Ghent, Belgium. Their effort has product over \$50,000 USD towards the project by using matching grants. Under the leadership of Phillippe Caron, they have provided exemplary *Service Above Self* as they also are now planning a surgical trip in May 2003. Past RI President Frank Devlyn has helped guide some of the communications and logistics critical to the project's success.

Clubs in Escondito, CA, and Warren, Oh. are also working on matching grants. The ability to utilize the Rotary International Foundation has been instrumental toward jump starting these efforts. Rotarians from Spain and the United States are volunteering too. Other benefits include working with the Lions Clubs, particularly of Acapulco, development of new RI members, increased interaction by clubs on different continents and an increased awareness of the problem globally.

So far the project has helped provide more than 1100 surgeries but the need is still substantial. The ability to work with the government of Mexico and private organizations like the WCF and Lions makes this a unique opportunity for international civic service. The project is reproducible in other countries as well.

If a truly altruistic chance to help the blind to see in a needy corner of the world sounds interesting, here are a few items to consider. We'd love to have direct participation in the surgical trips or funds for supplies. For more information, please do not hesitate to contact Mark B. Ruleman of the Memphis Rotary Club via email Mark.Ruleman@RaymondJames.com or by phone at 800-356-0347. The WCF web site is www.worldcataract.org, which explains more of the details.



VISIT THE TASK FORCE WEBSITE OFTEN!
www.rotarytaskforces.org/avoidable_blindness

