

**84TH ROTARY DISTRICT 9200
CONFERENCE & ASSEMBLY**

16 May 2009, UN Complex, Nairobi

MY YEAR AS GOVERNOR

By District Governor Kaushik Manek

Rotary International President's Personal Representative, who is also the Rotary International President-Nominee, Ray Klinginsmith and your dear wife Judie

Rotary International Director, Gordon McNally

Rotary International Director, Sam Owor

District Governor Elect Tadesse Alemu

District Governor Nominee Stephen Mwanje

Past District Governors

District and Country Officers

Assistant Governors

Club Presidents and Club Presidents Elect

My fellow Rotarians

Ladies and Gentlemen

I stand before you today to give possibly my last major address to the District as your District Governor. This is an emotional morning for me. For me, being Governor of this great District has been a terrific and experience filled journey which I will always treasure. I have met so many people, made so many new friends and strengthened old friendships. Whereas I have served in several positions as a Rotarian at the Club, Country and District levels, it is the experience over the last year that has really changed and transformed my life, I believe, forever. I have experienced, seen and touched first hand the miracle of Rotary, the glimpse of a better world through sharing and giving, understanding and friendship.

It has also been a learning experience-a first hand one than merely reading a report. The sight of mal-nutritioned children, mothers in labour, people dying of Malaria and diarrhoea-all pained me. It actually shook me and occasionally my blood down my spine chilled. But the smile on the faces of the little kids, the expectant mothers and the physically challenged whenever they saw us as if our physical presence was their reassuring to them that we are well-wishers gave me great joy and satisfaction and I discovered relevance.

And I can assert that our relevance is very objective. The objectivity is derived from our belief in "SERVICE ABOVE SELF".

At the first plenary session on Thursday morning, I enumerated many of our goals and achievements for the year and I don't intend to go through those again, but I am compelled to believe that my year cannot be defined as: "One who led the other" but a journey that we all undertook together to reach our sole destination of creating a better world. Thus I hope you will permit me to recount just some of my personal experiences of my year.

Ladies and gentlemen, I encountered my first major challenge six months before my term officially begun. I am sure you all remember the Post Election violence in Kenya in December 2007 that literally threatened to tear our country apart. I was honored to be an election observer during those elections and my friends the experience I had was simply first hand. In a matter of hours and days, ordinary people who had lived in harmony for a long time, turned against each other and a lot of lives and property was lost in the process. Like many other Kenyans, I shed my fair amount of tears while asking myself 'How Could This Ever Happen in Kenya?' I am sure every Kenyan present here today has a story to tell because we were all affected in one way or another. The words of Prince Gautama sums it up very well, because it only faith and determination that kept me going and somehow enabled me to pull through that difficult phase because there times when it simply felt as though everything was heading to a standstill. As a matter of fact, the biggest lesson learnt was that Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of Harmony and open interactions on a day to day basis.

I would like to salute the Kenyan Rotarians for accepting my request and mobilizing themselves into Disaster relief committees that mainly in the Central, Coastal and Western regions. We also sincerely thank the then District Governor, Chris Mutalya for mobilizing the District for their assistance as well as posting a request for assistance in the Rotary International Website. Some of the internally displaced persons moved into Uganda and our fellow Rotarians were on hand to visit them and take care of them during the tough times. All in all I must admit that despite the enormity of the Challenge, I am proud of the way we responded as Kenyan Rotarians, as District 9200 and above all as Rotary International. Let us not wait for something like that to happen again but instead continuously engage the community and spread messages of Peace and Harmony.

Moving on to my first official visit as a District Governor, I cannot forget the fact that I turned up in Kampala without my Chain of office. My good friend PDG Chris Mutalya had ceremoniously handed the Chain to me during the Dar es Salaam Conference and everyone imagined that I had it with me from 1st of July. The true story was that PDG Chris had promptly taken a well deserved break by travelling abroad on completion of his term and he forgot to hand over the chain to me. When I asked for it on my arrival in Kampala, I remember PDG Tusu jokingly saying that ‘I have seen something like that somewhere in Uganda Rotary Office’. What followed, ladies and gentlemen, was a series of events and frantic calls by the Rotary Club of Mengo that saw the Chain of office being delivered to me in record time thanks to the efficiency of the ‘Boda Boda’ transport network in Kampala.

My visits in Uganda were quite memorable and challenging at the same time because of the large number of Clubs in Uganda. It is therefore an impossible challenge to adequately summarize my visits in Uganda but rest assured that I cherish every single experience. Just to highlight a few experiences, I remember one day I was leaving my Hotel in Kampala to head to Gulu and the reception stopped in my tracks when she asked 'Are you going back to Nairobi? No I said I want to Gulu. You can't go to Gulu, No I said I am going to Gulu come what we may. ' The saddest thing is that Children are the main victims in such conflicts and I sincerely thank the Rotary Clubs of Gulu and Arua along with their counterparts in Uganda for the difference they are making to address the situation. Another memorable visit that deeply moved me was a visit to a Hospital which is a project of the Rotary Club of Muyenga, where I saw the hands of Rotary practically saving lives and giving hope to the entire community. I was also lucky to participate along Geeta at the 20 years celebrations of the Rotary Club of Kampala North and we were proud to see just how much it meant to the Rotarians after 20 years of selfless Service to the Community. To the Ugandan Rotarians, please accept my sincere appreciation for all the great time we shared together and for all the lessons we learnt from each other. Being a vegetarian, I thoroughly enjoyed the *Matoke Dishes* in Uganda and if it is OK with you I can use that reason to pay you some surprise visits in the Future.

Moving on to Tanzania, although there are only 17 Rotary Clubs in Tanzania, a few of the Clubs have managed to pull very big projects with a direct impact on the communities at hand. Tanzania was favoured by two visits by RI President D.K Lee during the one year, an honor for Tanzania, but also a battle cry for Tanzania Rotarians to tap into the enormous potential for Rotary growth in Tanzania. I was privileged to visit a 3 H Project courtesy of USA river and was deeply moved to see thousands and thousands of people proud of the work of Rotary having been empowered through some self help agricultural projects courtesy of the 3 H Grant. At one time, during my visit, I saw the green peas in one of the farms and I could not help it but grab a few of them and eat them raw. The Rotarians and community members who had accompanied me were quite shocked to see me doing so but I later explained to them that I grew up in a small village in Kenya and my mother used to grow green Peas. I have treasured them since then and I can assure I have eaten a lot of raw peas since my youthful days.

Another experience was when I flew to Karagwe in Tanzania by a charter flight from Entebbe via Bukoba with the Uganda Country Chair, Wycliffe Mulindwe . We were told not to land in Karagwe because the land strip was not safe but I insisted we must go and the Rotarians with me were not sure and thought that their District Governor was crazy. We did go and we did land safely. And on coming back all the Rotarians sighed with relief and confessed that they found the experience quite hell raising.

There is another particular experience I cannot seem to erase from my mind and I am sure many have heard it before. It was about my mosquito experience in Zanzibar. Ladies and gentlemen, Malaria is a number one killer of our children and you can never quite understand the challenge without paying a visit to Tanzania. I remember before my official visit to Zanzibar, we had a project visit in Tanga where I led in the donation of hundreds of mosquito nets to the students in a boarding school. I was quite impressed with my achievement of the day. I left on chartered flight for Zanzibar Stone Town promptly received by a welcome party made up of an army of mosquitoes majority of which had already taken residence inside the net I was meant to use. Had I been warned in good time, I would have kept one of the treated nets that I was distributing earlier in the day, a lesson to all of us that some of challenges that we work hard to deal with can also affect us directly.

Moving on to Ethiopia, I would also like to appreciate the great moments that had over there. With only 10 Clubs in Ethiopia, I was able to complete my all my visits in 2 trips to Ethiopia. Just like Tanzania I personally believe that Ethiopia is a sleeping giant in our District owing to the great size of the Country and the potential that exists there on. I am confident that with the District Governor Elect hailing from Ethiopia, Tadesse Alemu, will explore these challenges in greater detail and spur the growth of Rotary in the Country. I remember visiting the Rotary Club of Gondar where we had a candle lit Club assembly owing to a power failure. One Rotarian took advantage of the candlelit atmosphere and asked me to take a good look at him and he challenged me to recognize him at this conference. I haven't heard any complaints so far hence I am confident that I passed the test.

Another good experience I had happened when I was heading to Jimma and had just landed with the Country Chair Michael only to find no one waiting for us. The country Chair immediately broke some sweat as we stared at a deserted airstrip. To make matters worse the aircraft could only leave the next day hence we didn't have many choices. After period of anxiety, the Rotarians finally arrived to collect us with a number of cars expecting to find huge group. We later established that there was a communication breakdown and they had actually delayed because they were looking for a sufficient number of cars to receive the delegation.

My visit to the Ethiopian prisons was also quite an emotional one for me and it made me appreciate the tough challenges faced by the prisoners – AND FACILITIES PROVIDED.

Moving on to Kenya, I was quite impressed and challenged at the same time by the energies and projects being implemented by our Rotarians. I had visited a number of the Nairobi Projects before but I was still deeply touched some of them. One notable project is the 3H water and Sanitation Project in Kibera courtesy of the Rotary Club of Langata, a project we visited on Wednesday with President Nominee Ray. As you all know, Kibera is among the largest slums in East and Central Africa and it is an entire city on its own but with very many challenges. I sincerely thank the Rotary Club of Langata, the Rotary Club of Nairobi East and other Rotary Clubs in Nairobi that have some projects in the Kibera Slum and I challenge those that have not explored the area to do so and make a difference.

The Kenyan coastal Clubs also presented me with a good experience. It is a known fact that the Coastal region has some of the oldest Clubs as well the very senior Rotarians in our District. I had very big impression of the coastal Clubs ahead of my visits owing to its rich history. However I must say that some of the Clubs were initially a bit subdued and I tried my best to revitalize the Clubs. The positive thing to note is that by the time I left there was a spirit of YES WE CAN and it is my sincere hope that it will carry on with the same momentum.

One of my worst days during the year was given the news of the passing away of my sister when I was about to start the chartering ceremony of the Rotary Club of Winam. But I made the courage to carry on and complete the ceremony because I did not want to let the new Club down.

I said earlier, this is a journey that we have as Rotarians undertaken together. I want you to see, touch and feel my experience of a glimpse of a better future and I want to share with you a brief pictorial of my year as Governor with images of peoples, places and projects which I hope you will enjoy:

AFTER THE PICTORIAL

THANK YOU AND MAY GOD'S UNCEASING BLESSING BE WITH YOU ALWAYS!

YOU WILL GET A STANDING OVATION – DON'T SAY ANYTHING ELSE

THANKS TO GEETA AND SHAMIL IS BETTER DONE AT NIGHT AND HAVE CRAFTED SOMETHING REALLY GOOD FOR THE EVENING TOO