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District Governor
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Dear friends in Rotary,

The World Health Organization states that each year 303 thousand women die in pregnancy or during childbirth, while 2.7 million new-born die within 28 days of their birth and 2.6 million are the stillbirths.

The WHO states that the majority of these cases could be avoided by means of adequate basic healthcare. It also states that official statistics are inaccurate as, in many cases, maternal mortality as well as neonatal deaths are not indicated to the sanitary systems. Improving mother and child health standards is, therefore one of the Millennium objectives of the United Nations to which Rotary International adheres and for whom Maternal and Childhood health issues is one of the fundamental avenues of service.

Rotary International's action is based on careful analysis of the situation: Millions of children die every year before reaching the age of 5 due to malnutrition, the use of infected water, illnesses such as measles, TB, pneumonia, HIV, malaria, intestinal disease, poor medical assistance and inadequate health conditions.

There is an increase of infantile mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Southern Asia. Children born in poverty have almost twice the chance of dying before the age of 5 compared to those born to more affluent families. The offspring of educated mothers, even those mothers who have barely completed primary schooling, have a better chance of survival compared to those whose mothers are completely illiterate.

Maternal mortality has been reduced by approximately two thirds in Eastern and Southern Asia as well as in North Africa. However the proportion of mothers who do not survive childbirth is 14 times higher in underdeveloped regions if compared to developed regions. While more expectant-mothers are receiving pre-natal assistance only half the women living in developing areas receive the medical support they require.

Aware of this fact, RI has for decades offered the commitment of thousands of Rotarians and has favoured accessibility to quality medical assistance for mothers and children; RI finances training programmes for nurses, doctors, obstetricians and socio-sanitary operators; it distributes prevention instruments and pre-natal kits; it undertakes vaccination and immunization campaigns. RI has programmes for teaching mothers how to breast feed infants and maintain hygienic conditions, how to control children's health by regular checks, how to avoid the transmission of the HIV virus from mother to child by encouraging the use of adequate medication and feeding with artificial.

RI also finances programmes of family planning, within the principles of the communities in which it operates, in the full awareness that 80% of maternal deaths can be avoided by means of services related to sexual and reproductive instruction particularly with regards to safe and efficient contraception.

Much has been achieved with regards to access to clean water and hygiene, with regards to training and instruction, prevention and cure of several disease such as polio, HIV and malaria.

Since the start of the new millennium, life expectancy has increased by 5 years with a consistent increase in the African region where life expectancy has increased by 9.4 years having reached the 60 year goal thanks, mostly, to progress made in the field of infantile survival and the control of malaria and HIV.



The International community has set itself ambitious goals to be reached within 2030:

- The significant reduction of maternal mortality;
- ending childhood deaths caused by illness that can be prevented in children under 5 years of age; ending epidemics of AIDS, TB, malaria, hepatitis and other diseases caused by unhealthy water supply as well as infectious diseases;
- reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases; strengthen prevention and treatment of drug and alcohol abuse;
- cut down by half the numbers of dead and injured in traffic accidents;
- guarantee universal access to medical treatment, to sanitary assistance and to information about healthy sexual activity and reproductive systems;
- sustain research and development of vaccines and medication that are accessible to all;
- considerably increase funding for the training, development and the maintenance of health personnel in developing countries especially those which are the poorer and most troubled.

RI is ready to invest its resources to sustain these ambitious projects. After all, the commitment shown by Rotarians in every part of the world is proof of Rotary's ability to accept all challenges, even the most 'impossible'.

This year, more than ever, each child and each mother that we will succeed in curing and helping will be the best reply to the appeal made by our International President who has asked us to operate concretely by placing 'our' **Rotary serving Humanity**.