



## GREETINGS, DEAR CHANGE-MAKERS OF ROTARY,

**W**e have overcome so many challenges these past two years and changed many lives. It brings me great joy that we have worked so hard this year to grow Rotary through the Each One, Bring One initiative. The result has been excellent membership growth. Let us keep up the momentum.

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared that COVID-19 constituted a pandemic. Two years later it is important that we continue to draw on our expertise in disease prevention and treatment to help people worldwide cope with the continuing challenges. The pandemic continues to defy all expectations, but we cannot be frozen in fear. Our work is too important. It is also important that we make time for each other, and I urge you to register for the 2022 Rotary International Convention in Houston.

We can continue to build hope and spread peace by using our resources to help the most vulnerable. The pandemic has had an especially devastating impact on girls; on its first anniversary, Henrietta Fore, the executive director of UNICEF, said that “immediate action is needed to mitigate the toll on girls and their families.” This need remains just as strong a year later. The pandemic has affected girls in unique ways — stunting their educational attainment, weakening their job prospects, and contributing to other terrible results such as child marriages and increased human trafficking.

Data from UNICEF reveals why our action is so essential. In the 2010s, important progress was made toward eliminating the practice of child marriage, and UNICEF estimates that 25 million such marriages were averted worldwide. Unfortunately, the pandemic reversed those positive trends, and as a result an addi-

tional 10 million girls are vulnerable to becoming child brides by the end of this decade.

This is why our focus on Empowering Girls is such vital work, and I am delighted that President-elect Jennifer Jones has committed to continuing this initiative. In my travels, I have witnessed many wonderful examples of club projects that back our Empowering Girls goals. But all Rotary members know that real change requires big efforts sustained over many years. This is the power of our global grants and actions taken within our areas of focus.

I encourage clubs to think of innovative ways to empower girls when designing their grant projects. Every step we take to improve education, health care, and economic opportunities for girls makes an important difference in helping them achieve their full potential. With opportunity we create hope, and with hope we address the root causes of conflict around the world, setting the stage for sustainable peace.

None of us know how long the COVID-19 virus will linger — and as an organization that has worked tirelessly for decades to eradicate polio, we understand better than most the difficult work that lies ahead. That is why we need to remain focused on what is possible — not feeling nostalgic for the way our lives were, but looking hopefully to a future that uses this opportunity to Serve to Change Lives. I look forward to continuing this good work with you.

*Shekhar Mehta*  
President, Rotary International