

Rotarians against Child Slavery

IA Newsletter for the proposed Rotarian Action Group – See website www.racsrag.org

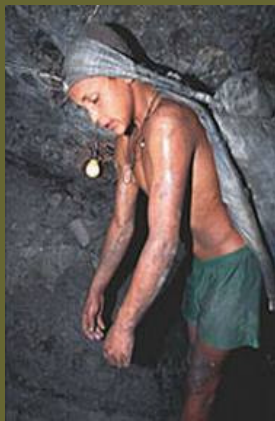
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Whatever you may do may be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it" (Gandhi)



"First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, and then you win" (Gandhi)



Action Group comes to a crossroads

On 1st February our proposed Rotarian Action Group against Child Slavery received the disappointing news from Ed Futa, the General Secretary of the RI Board that our application for RAG status had been

rejected. The written explanation subsequently received from Evanston states that "the Board felt that the proposed activities of the group were too heavily focussed on advocacy, whereas Rotarian Action Groups

are expected to provide expertise, assistance and support to Rotary clubs and districts in implementing community development and humanitarian service projects."

Which way should we go now ?

With this set back, we have three courses of action to consider. We can either

- accept that the RI Board will never officially recognize our Action Group and therefore decide to terminate this, as yet, unofficial Group, or
- persist with the Action Group, but widen its membership base to include non-Rotarians and other organizations, eg church communities, or
- honour the present Mission Statement (see below) and continue to

press for official RI recognition at a later date.

NB. Under the present rules, only Rotarians, spouses of Rotarians and Rotaractors may be members of a RAG.

At present I favour adoption of the option c) approach, but I am open to persuasion otherwise. I understand that the restriction on resubmissions has just been eased from two years to one year.

Under the previous rule, if proposed groups are

denied recognition, they may not reapply for approval for a period of two years from the date of denial.

Before making any decision on the way forward, I invite members to express their views on which of the above paths we should proceed along. I have already received comments from Rtn Carol Metzker from the Rotary Club of West Chester Downtown, USA. Carol's views are included on pages 4 and 5 of this Newsletter

The Mission Statement of the Action Group

In considering the way forward we need to be reminded of the Mission Statement which was submitted to the RI Board in March 2010. This was as follows:-

- to create awareness in Rotarian circles and with

the wider public of the plight of millions of children who are physically and mentally held captive for commercial gain.

- to take action by encouraging Rotarians to support, promote and

work with anti-slavery bodies worldwide in developing programmes, campaigns and projects that will help to make child slavery, history for many.



Too much focus on advocacy ?

The RI Board point out that the activities of the Group are heavily focussed on advocacy. Whilst we plead guilty to the charge, there is a logical reason which requires explanation.

The struggle to eradicate "slavery" requires a different approach to other humanitarian problems faced by Rotarians.

The raison d'être of most Rotarian Action Groups involved with services providing relief for such problems as Malaria, Aids, Blindness Prevention, Disaster Relief, Water and Sanitation etc, is clear cut, self evident and visible.

With these drawbacks,

advocacy within Rotarian circles is almost superfluous

The enslavement of children on the other hand is not self evident or visible. Slavery is illegal, but making something illegal does not make it cease to exist. Making it illegal only causes it to vanish from view. Behind closed doors, in remote places and right under our noses, slavery has continued, making people rich, feeding our lifestyles and burning up lives.

Because the crime of slavery is hidden, many still labour under the comforting myth that slavery is a thing of the past. So everyone working

against slavery today has to face a pervasive lack of public awareness and indifference.

In these circumstances it is logical for the proposed Rotarian Action Group to concentrate initially on raising awareness of the existence of slavery amongst the Rotary fraternity and the public at large. After all it is only through advocacy that people are encouraged to support service projects.

So, if the Action Group continues, advocacy and raising awareness **will** continue to be an integral part of the activities of the Group.

Support for humanitarian services ?

For many years, Rotarians have been battling on many fronts against killer diseases, low literacy levels, lack of water and non existent sanitation, but there is one struggle which has inexplicably never featured on Rotary International's radar, until fairly recently. This is the struggle to help end the enslavement of millions of children who are forced to work in factories, in fields, in homes, in quarries, in restaurants and in the sex trade where they are used and abused and for the young girls to be repeatedly traded on the female used body market.

Rotary International has already missed several opportunities to involve itself with the protection and rehabilitation of child slaves. But it will eventually participate if we keep pressing the case for action. Because of pressure from two Rotary Clubs in Norwich, the RI Board added the word "slavery" to its Code of Policies in relation to the Rights of Children in January 2009. The amended Code now states that

*"Rotary International recognising that children because of their vulnerability, need special care and attention.....endorses and supports the rights of children to food, shelter, health care, education and freedom from abuse, violence and **slavery**. Rotary clubs around the world are committed to protecting these rights for all children, regardless of race, creed or nationality.*

Because the anti-slavery initiative from within Rotary is only in its infancy, we do not have a plethora of service projects in the pipeline. Consequently we have to accept that the RI Board is correct in implying that the Action Group is not in a position to provide expertise, assistance and support to clubs and districts in implementing relevant humanitarian service projects.

Support for humanitarian services ? – Continued

But the situation is changing as more and more Rotary Clubs become involved in helping with the work of anti-slavery organisations and child slave rehabilitation centres. A glance at the list of completed projects in 2010 listed in the last Action Group Newsletter will confirm that clubs from England, India, France, Germany, USA and the Czech Republic have already been involved with anti-slavery projects which have originated within the Action Group. More projects are currently being envisaged in regions like Northern Thailand and Ghana. Very soon, the Action Group **will have** the expertise to support clubs and districts in implementing anti-slavery projects.

Conclusions

The RI Board has rejected our submission for approval because it maintains that the proposed activities of the Action Group were too heavily focussed on advocacy and not on projects. Whether the decision is fair or not, is no longer the point. The point is where do we go from here ? Terminating the Action Group, ie option a) is unthinkable because by doing so, we turn our backs on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of children and the most disgracefully overlooked crime against humanity. Slavery is kidnapping and torture and theft and assault and often rape all rolled together.

If we choose to continue along the originally perceived track for approved Rotarian Action Group status, ie option c) there is only one way that we can change the minds of the Board members. We have to initiate and participate in more anti-slavery projects. Are we up for the challenge ? Will we be active or passive members of the Action Group ? As active Rotarians we have played a significant part in almost eradicating polio from the face of the globe. We can certainly do the same for slavery, **if there is the will to do so.**

On the other hand if we choose to widen the membership base of the Action Group, ie option b) we would free ourselves from all the red tape and control which is inherent in the codes of practice and bylaws inherent in the current Rotarian Action Group (RAG) process. Instead of continuing as a RAG, we could form ourselves into a PAG, ie a People Action Group, which may or may join forces with anti-slavery projects initiated by Rotary Clubs.

Whatever choice we make, we know that the time is ripe **now** to end slavery. Certainly many of the obstacles (legal, moral and economic) faced by the abolitionists of the past have already been removed so we have no excuse to allow this evil practice to continue. Ending slavery won't end crime, but it will mean things will be stolen, not lives.

Wanted – Active Members

Are you an active Rotarian, the kind who would be missed
Or are you just contented to be on the members' list
Are you involved with projects or work in selfless mode
Or do you usually opt out...and let others bear the load
Do you take an active part to help the world along
Or are you merely satisfied just simply to belong
Think it over members, think just how you'd feel
If you were an active Rotarian and turned that Rotary wheel

[Please click onto the undermentioned link to see Robbie William's film on Child Slavery. It only lasts two and a half minutes](#)

<http://www.rotary-ribi.org/districts/committeedetails.asp?DistrictNo=1080&DistSubCteeID=437>

Comments by Rtn Carol Metzker, RC of West Chester Downtown, USA**Dear Readers**

Last week, I wrote the article below. Shortly afterwards, we received notification that RI Directors voted down our application for Rotarian Action Group status. Although the second paragraph is now obsolete, I have decided to leave the article as-is with the exception of the last paragraph, highlighted in blue.

Why is this article unchanged? Because our group's purpose has not wavered even one iota. Our mission is still to raise awareness of and take action against child slavery. If we choose to work together as a collaborative group, what would change but our name? Shakespeare described beautifully what many of us know right now:

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet."

Regardless of our name, we have a glorious opening today to continue our mission with Rotarians and non-Rotarians alike working side-by-side. We have a stellar opportunity to apply lessons that we have learned from Rotary project successes to a world problem that needs help from everyone—Rotarians, Lions, faith-based groups, people from every walk of life.

Even our questions about how to turn the tide against child slavery are steadfast. In light of the Board's decision—which is the only thing that has changed—I now ask:
*Are **you** part of the slavery solution?*

Is Rotary Part of the Slavery Solution?

By Carol Metzker

The phrase, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem," is an old African proverb adapted by last-century speechmakers, according to a few web sites.

This very day, as readers of this newsletter await the directors' decision of our fate as a sanctioned Rotary Action Group or as a group with a different designation, our focus must be on how we become part of the solution. As individual Rotarians, as club members—as humans—we can look to our success as Rotarians to solve slavery.

What is one of Rotary's greatest triumphs to consider as we understand the problem of slavery and fight it?

Polio. We all understand the perils of polio and the power we—together as a body of 1.2 million people—hold to eradicate it.

Rotarians have not spent hundreds of millions of dollars to free children from polio, only to see them enslaved.

* Of the money we have raised, much has been expended to immunize children up to the age of five. Sadly, children in many countries become vulnerable to slavery—and enslaved—between the ages of six and eight.

* In 1988, there were more than 350,000 cases of polio in 125 countries. In 2010, there were 921 cases. Rotary clubs have provided time, talent and treasure to come this far. They have also provided resources for rehabilitation and vocational-training to polio survivors. They have

funded educational projects that have resulted in communities' healthy practices, and students' knowledge in biology, medicine and sanitation engineering.

Today, there are approximately 27 million slaves worldwide. That is 8 times the number of polio cases 23 years ago. Many are children.

Imagine the impact that Rotarians could have—and are having—on the root causes of slavery: illiteracy, poverty, vulnerability because of natural disasters, strife, lack of education.

Our provisional group is taking action and making an impact. Our projects are like those related to polio and rehabilitation of its victims. We have provided resources for rehab centers and vocational-training. We are working to eliminate hunger, illiteracy and poverty.

The work of our group supports every RI theme there has ever been: Lend a Hand; Make Dreams Real; Building Communities, Bridging Continents. And it will continue to do so: Reach Within to Embrace Humanity.

Are you part of the slavery solution? I hope you will consider your role within humanity now and take a role in an Action Group Against Child Slavery.

Cotton picking in Uzbekistan

Anti-Slavery International is launching the [Cotton Crimes campaign](#) to step up action against child slavery in Uzbekistan's cotton industry. Fresh evidence has emerged from the most recent cotton harvest of children being forced from their classrooms into the fields to pick cotton for little or no pay.

As the third biggest global exporter of cotton, Uzbekistan's state-run cotton industry is reliant on forcing hundreds of thousands of children to work in order to reap Government profits of over US\$1 billion annually. However, the Government continues to deny the use of state-sponsored slavery.

The single biggest destination for Uzbek cotton is the European market. Despite strong condemnation from the European Union over the use of child slavery in Uzbek cotton production, the EU continues to allow the Government of Uzbekistan to benefit from reduced trading tariffs for its cotton imports. **The EU should not be financially rewarding Uzbekistan for using child slavery**

[Please sign the Cotton Crimes petition](#) on the link below calling upon the President of the European Parliament to remove trade preferences for Uzbekistan and stop child slavery.

<http://www.antislavery.org/english/campaigns/cottoncrimes/default.aspx>

[PLEASE ENCOURAGE FELLOW ROTARIANS TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE AND SIGN ON AS A MEMBER. THE WEBSITE IS: \[www.racsrag.org\]\(http://www.racsrag.org\). The Web Master is Stephen Sypula, RC of Stevenage Grange, England.](#)