

**Rotary**



**ESRAG**

**ENVIRONMENTAL  
SUSTAINABILITY**   
**ROTARY ACTION GROUP**

***We care about your climate future***

**July, 2023**

**Volume 8, Issue 1**

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## Rotary responds to the health havoc of climate change

This month we share powerful stories on the havoc climate change wreaks on mental and physical health. Rotary, Rotaract, and Interact clubs are rapidly building their knowledge, both on the impacts and on ways they can respond to mitigate harm and hasten recovery:

- Rotary as a voice of health in the climate change malady - Marija Jevtic, MD, PhD, Serbia
- Responding to the trauma of typhoons - Francis Abner Abanilla, Philippine Republic
- Rebuilding hope from the ashes in rural Victoria - Bernie Farquhar, Australia



We are also delighted to bring you a bumper crop of resources and good news in honor of Earth Day:

- IEA Executive Director Dr. Fatih Birol to address ESRAG April 27
- April webinars: four other Rotary Action Groups discuss the importance of the environment
- Spanish Rotarians launch Rotary Green Revolution
- Earth Day Water Minga building worldwide momentum
- Become Plastic Fishermen to engage your community in solutions
- Join the Plant-Rich Diet Challenge on Earth Day
- Eastern North America Chapter succeeds in ESRAG's first Project Fair
- Environmental stories blossoming in Rotary media
- Going to Singapore? Volunteer in ESRAG's booth

**Our May newsletter focuses on biodiversity and the June issue on food solutions.** We welcome news about your projects, or resources that you recommend to guide action on these topics. The deadline for May stories is April 21. Email us at [newsletter@esrag.org](mailto:newsletter@esrag.org) with your article. Write us by April 12 if you'd like to be interviewed. We wish you an Earth Day month filled with hope, confidence, and impact!

*Graphic: one of the many calls to action by San Pedro's Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Interactors as typhoons slammed their region of the Philippine Republic at the height of the pandemic in 2020.*

### Connect with us on social media



## Rotary as a voice of health in the climate change malady

by *Marija Jevtic, MD, PhD, Rotary Climate Ambassador, D 2483*



If our planet Earth were to be viewed as an organism, it could be said to have become “highly febrile.” Human activities focused on industrial and economic development in the pursuit of material gain, combined with completely absent or insufficient concern about their influence on the environment, have led to a reaction by the planet.

Serbian Rotarians and Rotaractors are implementing urgent, wide-reaching work to raise awareness of this crisis within Rotary and beyond, mobilizing the trust and leadership we've earned through our professions, our Rotary District and Zone, our roles in civil society, and the European Union. This article sketches our action starting in Rotary International's Imagine year (2022-23) and projects it into the future.

As a physician and professor of public health, I'll start with a review of the symptoms our planet is manifesting because of the malady of climate change, and the impacts these are having on the health and mental health of humans. Then, I'll report on the actions we are taking as members of the Rotary family,

and how we're connecting with a wider audience.

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## IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol to address ESRAG April 27

By *Laurie Zuckerman, ESRAG Communications Director*

**Dr. Fatih Birol**, Executive Director of the [International Energy Agency](#), has agreed to hold a discussion with ESRAG members by Zoom on April 27. The meeting will be at 1400 UTC, 9 am Evanston time.



[Forbes](#), [Time](#), and [Financial Times](#) magazines have listed Dr. Birol, who chairs the [World Economic Forum Energy Advisory Board](#), as one of the world's most influential people on energy. He has strengthened ties with emerging economies to help them make the transition to clean energy.

Birol will be joined by **Pat Merryweather-Arges**, Rotary International Board Vice President 2023-24; Rotary International Director 2022-24; Water, Sanitation, Hygiene Rotary Action Group Board 2019-25 and Chair 2024-25; Rotary District International Services Chair 2016-23; District Representative to Council on Legislation and Resolution 2020-23.

**Judith Diment**, MBE, Dean of the Rotary Representative Network, will moderate the discussion. Ms. Diment led Rotary International's Delegation to the UN Climate conference in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Save the date and look for an email with more details and a registration form.

*Photos (from left): RI Vice President Pat Merryweather-Arges, Dr. Fatih Birol, and Judith Diment, MBE*

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## Responding to the trauma of typhoons

By Francis Abner Abanilla, Rotary Club of Metro San Pedro, Laguna, Philippine Republic



On Nov. 1 2020, in the middle of the Covid pandemic, Typhoon Goni made landfall as a Category 5 cyclone in the Bicol region, south of where I live. With speeds of 140-150 mph, it devastated many towns. Magnifying the damage, tons of mud flowed down the slopes of the Mayon Volcano, which stood in the path of the storm. A lot of provinces in the region lost electricity. On the other side of the volcano, houses were buried by mud and lahar that flowed down the slopes of the volcano for miles!

Our club teamed up with the youth clubs that we sponsored - the Rotaract Club of Metro San Pedro, Rotaract Club of San Pedro All Star, and the Interact Club of San Lorenzo School - and started calling for donations to help the people in Bicol. Barely a week later, Typhoon Vamco entered the country, bringing torrential rains which flooded the same region up to Laguna, where I live. The flooding was so dire that hundreds of families had to be evacuated.

Before we could bring the [relief donations](#) to over 500 families in the Bicol region, we first had to help about 600 families [in our hometown](#) who were temporarily living in cramped shelters. We were only able to have the chance to

bring the [relief goods to Bicol](#) in the third week of November.

Before the month of November ended, we were [mobilizing again](#), trying to help the town of Rodriguez east of Manila, which was inundated by floodwaters from a river that overflowed due to heavy rains. And would you believe, by December we were again gathering relief goods to be sent north of Manila to the province of Cagayan which was also inundated by floodwaters from a dam that had to release water because it was in danger of overflowing due to the effect of the same typhoon Vamco! This was the worst flooding in Cayagan in 40 years. Cayagan Governor Manuel Mamba [cited environmental neglect and abuse](#) as a prime factor in the catastrophic flooding, and called for a wholistic strategy.

I guess you can imagine the mental stress that we had to endure during that period when the whole world was locked in their homes, afraid of catching Covid.

*Photo: reaching for relief aid in Bicol. All photos are from the Rotary Club of Metro San Pedro, D 3820, Philippine Republic.*  
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# Rebuilding hope from the ashes in rural Victoria

*by Ariel Miller, ESRAG Newsletter Editor*

Starting in 2019, a series of environmental disasters devastated the livelihoods of communities in East Gippsland, a rural region of Victoria, Australia for which farming, timber, and tourism have been economic mainstays. The 2019 drought triggered a catastrophic summer of bushfires. Combined, these disasters caused the death of millions of animals and the destruction of farm buildings, fencing, and machinery.

Right on the heels of these calamities, the Covid pandemic drove Australia into lockdown, isolating families who had already suffered catastrophic losses. The suicide rate rose.

A new blow this year is the state government's decision to halt timbering in native forests six years ahead of schedule because - ironically - of court rulings to protect vulnerable species. A thousand people in East Gippsland now need to find new jobs. The state is offering transition funding, but the impact on laid-off workers and local economies will be rough.

"It has been quite a journey the last seven years - quite tough on our farming community, which impacts the community's mental health as a whole," says Rotarian Bernie Farquhar, RC Mitchell River (in photo) who mobilized several Rotary and Lions Clubs to provide both practical aid and emotional support. In the process, they forged a regional team for disaster response. This included training the volunteers on how to facilitate mental health discussions and raising the funds to host social events like barbecues where people could get together and "start the conversation," Farquhar adds. From these chats, Rotarians refer people to Rural Minds for counseling if needed.

One of the great strengths that Rotary offers in disasters is the fact that local clubs are rooted in the affected communities. They share the suffering and the determination to recover.

*Photos courtesy of East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid.*

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## April webinars: Rotary Action Groups and environmental action

*By Laurie Zuckerman, ESRAG Communications Director*



**Join 5 Rotary Action Groups  
during  
Rotary Environment Month**

What are your biggest worries about the future? Chances are one of the Rotary Action Groups is tackling it. During April, Rotary's Environment Month, ESRAG's Projects seminar features experts from four other Rotary Action Groups (RAGs). Each describes what their RAG does, how it's affected by the environment, and how its work positively affects the environment.

Please press the links below to register. What if you can't attend, but want to get the recordings? Simply register anyway and sign up for "weekly invitations." The invitations you receive will include links to the recordings of previous ESRAG webinars.

**Rotary Action Group for Peace: 20 Minute Peace Conference**

[Wednesday 3 April](#), 1400 UTC, 900 am Evanston, 1930 India

This is a fast-paced presentation of IEP's Global and Positive Peace Indices. Current world peace statistics are discussed as well as

Rotary's view on Peace as one of their seven areas of focus.

**Presenter:** James Stuart is currently a Director for the RAG For Peace and an Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) Ambassador. He has served as VP/GM for Hewlett Packard, a COO for Loud Technologies, and President for a firm called Sharper Counsel.

**Basic Education and Literacy: How Educating Girls Helps Fight Climate Change**

[Wednesday 10 April](#), 1400 UTC, 900 am Evanston, 1930 India

We will discuss some of the challenges facing girls and how education may be a key to mitigating climate change.

**Presenter:** Joan Littleford is a retired education consultant and avid interpretive guide at the Toronto Zoo. Joan is on the Board of Directors of the Basic Education and Literacy Rotary Action Group.

**Rotary Action Group for Community Economic Development**

[Wednesday 17 April](#), 1400 UTC, 900 am Evanston, 1930 India

RAGCED is a source of knowledge and expertise, helping Rotarians plan, implement, and manage impactful and sustainable economic development projects. The session will focus on how RAGCED works and how it is responding to opportunities for improving lives around the world.

**Presenters:** Nilam Bedi is the Cadre Coordinator for Rotary's Community Economic Development area of focus and also the Technical Officer for ESRAG and Director of RAGCED.

**Water, Sanitation, and Health Rotary Action Group**

[Wednesday 24 April](#), 1400 UTC, 900 am Evanston, 1930 India

WASH Rotary Action Group links water and sanitation to improved hygiene, better health, and empowerment of the community.

**Presenter:** K. Neil Van Dine - Immediate past Chair of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Rotary Action Group (WASH-RAG); co-Founder of Haiti National Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Initiative (HANWASH)

Hope to see you there,  
Laurie

# We are Rotary Green Revolution

*by Alfredo Valero,  
Assistant Governor, D 2202*

Rotary Green Revolution (RGR) is a global organization that brings together Rotarians from around the world to support Rotary clubs and districts in the fight to mitigate the effects of the climate emergency and accelerate the shift to a decarbonized energy model.

## Mission and vision

The project was born in Spain in July 2022 as a spin-off of [Rotary Forests](#) to provide technical assistance and other resources to a wider range of environmental projects undertaken by clubs and districts. It was designed with a completely cross-cutting approach, covering a broad spectrum of environmental protection projects and reinforcing all seven Rotary Areas of Focus. The mission was to bring about a revolution within District 2202 (as a pilot district) to help implement and galvanize environmental projects at a local level but with a global perspective.

During her year as Governor of District 2202, Ingrid Steinhoff was key to implementing Rotary Green Revolution's strategy in her district, making D 2202 a pioneer through calculating its carbon footprint, designing actions to reduce the footprint, and offsetting the rest with reforestation projects in order to achieve NetZero.

Rotary Green Revolution is promoting the development of vertically-integrated programs and campaigns that link projects to achieve synergy. Our goal is to choose projects that are replicable and scalable at an international level.

The idea of "Green Revolution" arises from the need to:

- Help Rotarians and clubs to take action on impactful environmental protection campaigns that encourage Rotarians to be protagonists in the green revolution.
- Inspire Rotarians as well as individuals and organizations outside of Rotary to join our causes.
- Make people understand that environmental protection reinforces the other humanitarian work of Rotary International. For example, some environmental projects help to develop local economies. Others can prevent disease by increasing access to clean water or reducing air pollution.

Realizing that reducing the effects of climate change and environmental degradation can help to promote peace, The Rotary Foundation will hold a conference on "Earth and Peace" in Avila (Spain) on April 27. Rotary Green Revolution and Rotary Forests have actively collaborated in the planning. The conference will feature several top-level speakers to explore how environmental protection can prevent conflicts. You can [register at this link](#).

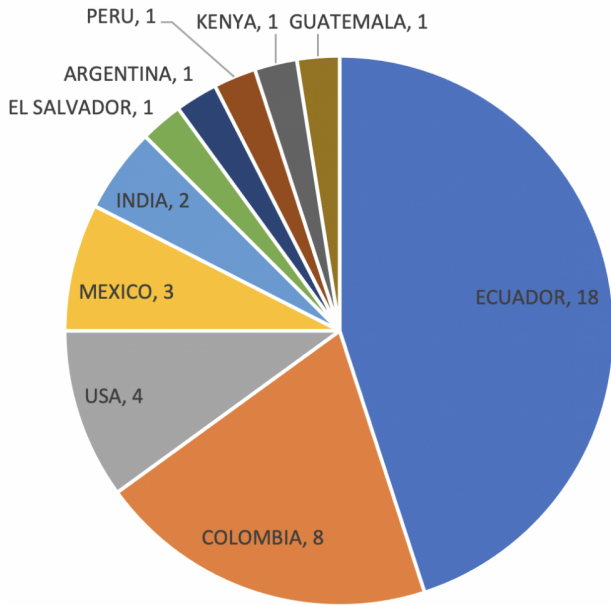
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## Earth Day Water Minga building worldwide momentum

*By Natalia Luque Sánchez, ESRA Latin America Correspondent*



By late March, forty Rotary Clubs and organizations from ten countries had already embraced the call from Ecuadoran Rotarians and nonprofits to achieve the biggest water clean up ever done by Rotary.

The World Minga for Water is an initiative to unite as many volunteers as we can across the world, on Earth Day, to do a cleanup of water bodies, beaches or natural places that impact our most important resource. The project has already started to become a big event and has brought so much interest that many environmental organizations and alliances are joining in. This project will enhance Rotary's [Community Action for Fresh Water](#) partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme(UNEP). It's also connecting us to major nonprofits like [Waterkeeper Alliance](#). Universities are also joining in many localities.

Rotarians in Ecuador, where the project was born, have already signed up 18 clubs from different locations across the country. Colombia is next with eight projects, and the United States with four. Participating clubs will receive an information package with ideas for environmental education, practical strategies for the activity, advice, and tools for preparing for the event and, finally, a link to register the activity and its results.

Does your Club want to join this important global event? Here is the link to [register](#) and receive the resource materials. To learn more about this project, check the [article](#) we wrote about it on ESRAG's website.

Help this initiative become truly global: [join in!](#) And share it through these World Water Minga graphics for [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#).

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## Become Plastic Fishermen to engage your community in solutions

**By Deniz Vural, ESRAG Director**

The Earth's vast oceans, constituting about 70% of the planet's surface, contain [approximately 97% of its water](#), with the remaining 3% found in various forms such as glaciers, ice, underground reservoirs, rivers, and lakes. This distribution emphasizes the scarcity of freshwater, making up less than 3% of Earth's total water. Beyond its role in sustaining life, the oceans serve as a dynamic force in the global water cycle, connecting Earth's water resources through intricate processes.

Regrettably, this fragile system faces a grave threat from the escalating global crisis of plastic pollution.

The United Nations Environmental Programme ([UNEP](#)) reports that each day an amount equivalent to 2,000 garbage trucks laden with plastic finds its way into the world's oceans, rivers, and lakes. This is comparable to tipping a dustbin lorry into the ocean every minute. Approximately 13 million tonnes of plastic enter the ocean yearly. Comprising 80% of litter items globally, plastic pollution, particularly from single-use takeout food and beverage containers (50–88%), has significantly increased over the past decade.

Acknowledging the critical importance of ocean literacy, you can draw on the resources of [Plastic Fisherman](#), a global educational project committed to raising awareness about the perils of marine plastic pollution. Their mission is to inspire action through the potent combination of creativity, art, positivity, and community engagement. Your Club or District can use its strategies to

communicate effectively about the ocean and equip your community to make informed, responsible decisions to protect ocean resources, grounded in knowledge about the vital ecological services the oceans provide. *Graphic: Instagram posts from Plastic Fishermen in Germany.*

[Read More](#)



## Join the Plant-Rich Diet Challenge on Earth Day!

**By Kris Cameron, Co-Chair, ESRAG Plant-Rich Diet Task Force**



## YOUR PLATE IMPACTS THE PLANET



JOIN OUR 15 DAY PLANT-RICH DIET CHALLENGE

A GUIDED JOURNEY TOWARD IMPROVED PERSONAL AND PLANETARY HEALTH

STARTING EARTH DAY APRIL 22, 2024



A SIMPLE and DELICIOUS Climate Solution  
The POWER is on YOUR Plate!

For more information : [esrag.org/plant-rich-diet](https://esrag.org/plant-rich-diet) email: [plantrich@esrag.org](mailto:plantrich@esrag.org)



Can't afford an electric car? Solar panels not an option? There is an inexpensive and easy way for all of us to tackle climate change every day!

Project Drawdown, an ESRAG partner, has identified **reducing food waste** and **adopting plant-rich diets** as the two most powerful steps we can take to reduce GHG emissions. How do these contribute to global climate disruption? When organic waste breaks down in landfills it generates approximately 8-10% of global methane emissions. Methane traps up to 84% more heat in the atmosphere than CO<sub>2</sub> over a 20-year period.

Plant-rich diets reduce the demand for animal products, the industrial production of which is a major cause of GHG emissions, deforestation, biodiversity loss, air and water pollution, and a host of **other impacts on human and environmental health**.

Experts warn that even if we reach net-zero emissions in the transportation and energy sectors, without significant **reductions in the agriculture sector**, we will not be able to maintain stable global temperatures.

Rotarians can choose the plant-rich menus that work for their lifestyles. We invite you to learn how, by taking the ESRAG 15-Day Plant-Rich Diet Challenge that starts this Earth Day, April 22. The Challenge is a guided journey to improved personal and planetary health. Here's a [preview presentation from the Challenge](#) with excellent tips to get you started. The Challenge also includes a cookbook, recipes, and much more!

Register for the ESRAG 15-Day Plant-Rich Diet Earth Day Challenge [HERE!](#) For more information visit our webpage or email us at [plantrich@esrag.org](mailto:plantrich@esrag.org). Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

**Every Day Can Be Earth Day, *when you tackle climate change one bite at a time!***

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# Eastern North America succeeds with ESRAG's first Project Fair

**By Caroline DeWitt, Chair,  
ESRAG Eastern North America Chapter**

ESRAG's Eastern North America Chapter (ESRAG ENA) held a dynamic project fair Jan. 18-21 to showcase a wide variety of environmental projects being undertaken by Rotarians throughout the multinational region. The event was hosted by the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay and the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, a beautiful city on Florida's Gulf Coast. We had three goals:

- To raise awareness of Rotary's district and global grants for environmental projects;
- To showcase current and planned environmental projects in our chapter; and
- To offer networking opportunities with Rotarians, ESRAG members and avid environmentalists across North America and the Caribbean.



Rotary International has been promoting [project fairs](#) since 2004, and featured the concept in a 2019 issue of Rotary Magazine. These gatherings connect clubs that are seeking international service projects with those that are interested in collaborating with global partners to carry out humanitarian work in their own region. Project fairs typically last two to three days, and may include visits to service projects or opportunities to experience the local culture.

In September 2023, our Regional Chapter, ESRAG Eastern North America, decided to organize a project fair entirely focused on the environment. Rotary's newest humanitarian focus aligns with several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including Climate Action: (Goal 13), Life Below Water (Goal 14) and Life on Land (Goal 15), as we strive to contribute to a more sustainable and resilient future for all.

Our Regional Chapter extends from Eastern Canada to the Caribbean. We are a lively group of more than 340 members from 62 Rotary Districts. Our Environmental Project Fair drew a large audience including participants from Canada and the North East region of the US, students enrolled in sustainability and climate change courses, visitors from Suncoast Science Centre, and avid environmentalists who traveled from nearby cities including Longboat Key, Orlando, Siesta Key and Naples. Thanks to the high-tech facilities at the Ringling College of Art and Design, we were able to welcome virtual participants as well. *Photo: Project Fair speakers and organizers at Sarasota Bay. Caroline DeWitt is in the center, in striped blouse.*  
[Read More](#)

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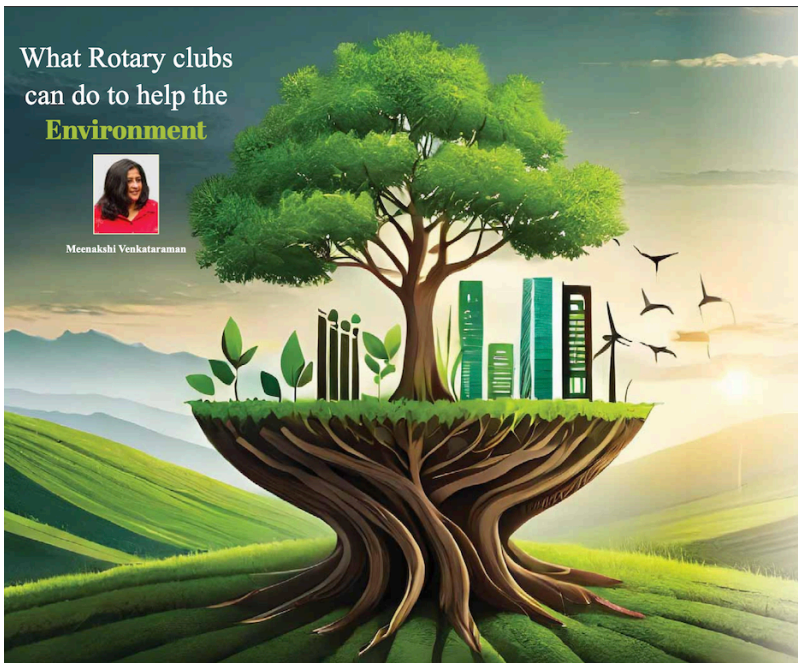
## Environmental stories blossoming in Rotary media

**By Ariel Miller, ESRAG Newsletter Editor**

What Rotary clubs  
can do to help the  
**Environment**



Meenakshi Venkataraman



Rotary media are blooming with articles on the environmental work of Rotarians all across the world! Here a few of the beautiful examples, and how you can generate more buzz in the Rotary family hive:

The April 2024 issue of *Rotary Magazine* is packed with environmental stories, from Rotarians' partnership with Trees that Feed Foundation in the Caribbean to Ron Diridon's story on Rotarians' passionate advocacy for sustainability - including high speed rail - in California. If you are a subscriber, have a wonderful time reading through the magazine and consider sending a letter to the editor with thanks, and a few sentences about your own environmental work. This shows readers that the support for environmental action is broad-based and growing in Rotary. The email is

[magazine@rotary.org](mailto:magazine@rotary.org).

ESRAG river champion Salvador Rico authored the March 22 Rotary Service in Action blog inviting Rotarians worldwide to participate in the new Community Action for Fresh Water partnership between Rotary and the United Nations Environment Programme. On March 5, the [Rotary Voices blog showcased Kris Cameron](#), Co-Chair of ESRAG's Plant-Rich Diet Task Force. She wrote about her discovery that Rotary had an environmental focus and Action Group. These inspired her to make Rotary the channel for pouring her lifelong experience as an educator into encouraging and equipping people worldwide to adopt a high-impact climate solution.

Regional Rotary magazines, in an array of languages, are an incredibly effective way to show Rotarians that people who they can identify with are succeeding in environmental action. ESRAG Director Dr. Mina Ventakaraman has a comprehensive article, "What Rotary Clubs can do to help the environment," in the April 2024 issue of *Rotary News India*, pp. 60-65. "Climate change: Africa engaged in reforestation" is the April, 2024 cover story of Rotary Mag, which covers Francophone nations. *Rotary en el Corazón de las Américas* regularly publishes stories by ESRAG's Latin American correspondent Natalia Luques Sánchez.

Write us at [newsletter@esrag.org](mailto:newsletter@esrag.org) if you need the contact information for the Rotary periodical that covers your region: we're glad to help you share the great news of your Rotary environmental work.

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# Going to Singapore? Volunteer in ESRAG's booth!

*By Ambaree Majumder, 2023-24 President, Rotary Club of Marina City, Singapore*

Are you attending the 2024 Rotary International Convention in Singapore? Are you concerned about the environment? Then volunteer a few hours at ESRAG's House of Friendship Booth!

The convention will be from May 25-29 at the Marina Bay Sands. Don't worry about the schedule at this point, just let us know you are attending. Check the last option, "unsure," on this [sign-up form](#).

You can also compensate for your flight's carbon emissions by using ESRAG's [Flight Carbon Estimator](#) and making a contribution to The Rotary Foundation's environmental fund. Your dollars support Rotary Global Grant projects that prevent or sequester carbon AND count toward Paul Harris awards.

See you there! For more information, contact [esrag-ricon-events@esrag.org](mailto:esrag-ricon-events@esrag.org).



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## The Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group

operates in accordance with Rotary International policy, but is not an agency of, or controlled by, Rotary International.

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