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How Rotarians catalyze resilient food systems



Rotarians are working worldwide to increase crop yields and reduce food waste. Their humanitarian goal is to improve food security and mitigate climate change. This work ranges from technical assistance to advocacy. It covers the entire supply chain, from rebuilding depleted soils to making sure wholesome food reaches hungry people instead of rotting in landfills.

You'll see how Rotarians are connecting food solutions to peacemaking, safe water, and community economic development. The leaders you'll read about range in

age from 17 to 75. They come from Africa, the Caribbean, South America, North America, and India.

In addition, you'll find tools to help your club measure its baseline environmental impact and map a smart route towards Becoming Sustainable. We spotlight a climate-friendly club in the Virgin Islands. Yours could be next! Just click "reply" to tell us what your club is doing to set a great example in your community and District.

We're thrilled to announce two new job openings at ESRAG. We can do this because of an anonymous donor's generous matching challenge, which was met by ESRAG's board and gifts to this year's Earth Gives Day campaign. This issue explains the crucial work these new team members will do in expanding Rotarians' environmental awareness and action, and how to apply.

Finally, we write in grief over the untimely death of ESRAG Director Jorge Aufranc, a passionate environmental advocate within Rotary's top leadership team, and of Mike Cloutier, who put in countless hours teaching us and troubleshooting the IT systems on which we utterly rely.

Graphic: Rotarian Doug White's collage of St. Thomas East Eco's global grant project that provided solar power, battery storage, a walk-in cooler, and storm resilience for the Bordeaux Farmers' Market on St. Thomas. "WGFI" stands for We Grow Food, Inc, the non-profit organic farmer co-op that runs the market. Read more in "Farmers' Market solarizes to save food

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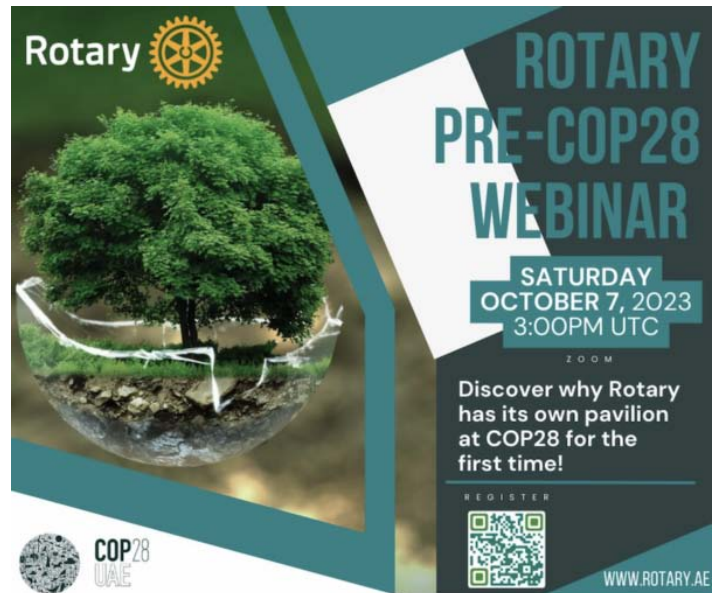


Rotary's top leaders to attend COP 28

By Yasar Atacik, PhD, ESRAG Chair

For the first time, Rotary will have a pavilion and programming in the Blue Zone at this year's UN Climate Conference – COP 28 - which will take place in Dubai from Nov. 30 to Dec. 12. Rotary's senior leaders will attend with a significantly expanded delegation including four ESRAG members. The Conference of the Parties (COP) is convened by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Blue Zone is the official plenary and negotiation space for the COP. Rotary's goals in attending COP 28, according to delegation chair Judith Diment, are to promote Rotary senior leaders' engagement with high level government people and to strengthen relations with the UN. This also gives us a chance to tell what Rotary does. Rotary's COP 28 Planning Committee, led by Judith Diment and Dr. Chris Puttock, have been working on planning since the beginning of the year. Rotarians from the UAE are providing critical support for the organization.



We've just learned that the **Association of Rotary Clubs of the UAE is hosting a webinar Oct. 7** to explain their role in supporting Rotary's pavilion in the Blue Zone. You can get further details about their webinar and [register here](#).

Rotary's engagement with COP has grown exponentially over the last five years. In 2018 ESRAG Co-Founder Karen Kendrick-Hands attended COP 24 as Rotary's first observer-delegate ever. RI Presidents Shekhar Mehta and Jennifer Jones attended COP 26 and 27 with a delegation.

This year our delegation includes Rotary's top leaders: RI President Gordon McNally, Rotary Foundation Chair Barry Rassin, and General Secretary and CEO John Hewko. The delegation is led by Judith Diment, dean of the Rotary Representative Network to the United Nations and International Agencies. Mohamed Delawar, Rotary's representative to the Arab League, and Rotarians from Dubai will also attend. Dr. Chris Puttock, Dr. Mina Venkataraman, Salvador Rico and I will be part of the delegation representing ESRAG.

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Farming carbon to feed the world and reach net zero

By Daman S. Walia, PhD and Samuel Lee Hancock, PhD

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [warns](#) that rapid worldwide soil erosion endangers

The effect of humic acid was tested on nutrient retention and organic matter content in sandy soils planted with tobacco (Figure 5). Over 90 days, the addition of humic acid doubled organic matter content in soil and retained more P, K, Mg, Ca, and Zn than the control. In addition, there was increased root mass and 10% increase in height and corresponding weight.

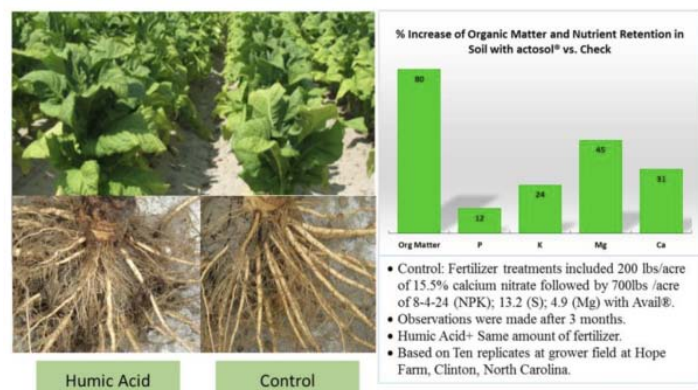


Figure 5. Humic Acid Amendment Increased Organic Matter and Nutrient Retention in the Soil and Plant Biomass.

the food security of the world's growing population. "If we don't act now, over 90% of the Earth's soils could become degraded by 2050," they warn. "Soil erosion can decrease crop yields by up to 50 percent. In addition, crops that do grow tend to be of a lower quality: misshapen, smaller, and less nutritious."

Restoring carbon in the form of organic humic matter is essential to restoring the fertility of depleted soils. It is also one of the most powerful climate actions we can take and can be implemented by farmers right now. [Soils are the fourth largest storehouse](#) of carbon after sedimentary rocks, fossil fuels, and oceans. The fifth is air. Together with greenhouse gas emissions,

the loss of soil carbon is an existential danger to humankind.

The solution is to rebuild the soil's fertility and capacity as a carbon sink. In this article, we'll outline how. We recommend the creation of a Rotary Climate Change Support Group to help Rotarians promote agricultural practices that durably store carbon in soils, help farmers qualify for carbon credits, promote sound public policy, and leverage other funding for these projects.

Imagine what 1.4 million Rotarians can accomplish! We challenge your club to engage ten farms in your region to implement this solution and demonstrate its benefits. Then catalyze the partnerships to scale it up rapidly.

Graphic: impact of humic acid on nutrient retention and organic matter in sandy soils on a farm in North Carolina, USA. Daman S. Walia, PhD, "Actosol Organic Humic-Fulvic Fertilizer for Increased Crop Yields, Quality, Carbon-Rich Organic Humic Matter and Improved Soil Health," Arcotech, Inc. August, 2022.

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Soil is Our Common Ground

By Laurie Zuckerman, ESRAG Director and Communications Chair

Join ESRAG on October 25 to preview a clip from the documentary "[Common Ground](#)," winner of the 2023 Human/Nature Award at the 2023 Tribeca Festival. Common Ground is the sequel to "[Kiss the Ground](#)," which touched over 1 billion people globally and inspired the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to put \$20 billion toward soil health.

By fusing journalistic exposé with deeply personal stories from those on the front lines of the food movement, "Common Ground" unveils solutions to our broken food system. The film profiles a hopeful and uplifting movement of white, black, and indigenous farmers who are using regenerative models of agriculture that can balance the climate, save our health, and stabilize America's economy.

On Oct. 25 we'll get to preview a 25-minute clip plus have the opportunity to ask questions from a member of the film's team and Rotarian Leanne Robinson, who is promoting many premieres through Rotary clubs in their local communities.

[Register for LIVE Clips + Discussion](#): Wed 25 Oct, 9 am Chicago, 2 pm UTC, 7:30 pm India (Press for [time zone](#) near you.)



Restoring land and livelihood in Colombia

By Natalia Luque Sánchez, *ESRAG Latin America Correspondent*



Colombia has been suffering from internal [armed conflict](#) for more than 60 years between the state, guerrillas, and paramilitaries, aggravated by drug cartels. The fighting has been devastating for the civilian population. An estimated 220,000 people - at least 177,000 of them non-combatants - have died as a result of the conflict.

After many setbacks and difficulties, a [peace agreement](#) was signed in 2016 between the government and one of the main guerrilla groups. One of the many regions affected by the conflict is in the area surrounding the Siberia Ceibas Regional Natural Park in a state called Huila in Colombia. This story reports how Rotarians and Rotaractors are

helping survivors heal the havoc of war by working together on reforestation and economic development.

Carlos Alberto Muñoz, spokesman for the project from the Neiva Las Ceibas Rotary Club, tells us how the inhabitants of this area suffered from the armed confrontation. Bombings, forced displacement, arbitrary detentions, disappearances and recruitment of children as soldiers were the reality of the rural communities in this area for more than 40 years.

He explains that the region was environmentally wracked by illegal mining and extensive cattle ranching, causing deforestation, contamination of the waters of the area's river basins and loss of biodiversity. As a strategy to begin to mitigate the damage in the region, the Siberia Ceibas Regional Natural Park reserve was created in an area of 27,104 hectares. The communities were then trapped in a reserve zone, on unproductive or small plots of land, where they are only able to make limited use of their traditional agricultural practices and can only partially meet their food needs.

The Neiva Las Ceibas Rotary and Rotaract Clubs, wanting to help reforest the degraded areas and find ways to support the economy of the villagers, visited and consulted the local community. In the midst of the incredible beauty of the Park, they found areas with great environmental damage. Non-combatants were coexisting there with former guerrilla fighters who had victimized them.

Photos of the Silberia Ceibas Regional National Park used with the permission of Corporación Autónoma del Alto Magdalena CAM

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Maryland Interactors win EPA award

By Joe Richardson, *Southern Frederick Rotary Club, Maryland, USA*

On August 3, 2023, Advika Agarwal and Angelina Xu, Co-Presidents of the Richard Montgomery High School Interact Club, and fellow student Shruti Amula received the US Environmental Protection Agency's Presidential Environmental Youth Achievement Award for District 3.



These amazing young women were three of only 34 students throughout the United States to receive this prestigious award. They were honored for spearheading a school-based program to divert lunchroom waste from landfills and incinerators, and for mobilizing students to convince the Maryland Legislature to pass a new state law and \$250,000 in funding to expand the program statewide.

Lunch out of Landfills reduces greenhouse gas emissions and promotes food security by diverting food waste from landfills to composting, and sending safe, uneaten food to neighbors in need. This program can save schools substantial sums on waste disposal.

Visit ESRAG's [Lunch out of Landfills page](#) and scroll down for the amazing story of their successful advocacy.

Here is the story of the impact they have already had on our state and nation.

Award winners Advika Agarwal (left) and Angelina Wu (right) with EPA's Elena Goldstein, lead for Sustainable Management of Food for Region 3. Fellow awardee Shruti Amula was unable to attend. Photo by Monika Maheshwari.

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Farmers' market solarizes to save food and money

By Ariel Miller, ESRAG Newsletter Editor

One of the major challenges to human food security is that a third of the food we raise ends up spoiling or being thrown away before anyone can eat it. The [environmental impact is equally huge](#), generating one third of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions throughout the life cycle from field to landfill. In that context, heartfelt congratulations to the Rotary Club of St. Thomas East Eco for their global grant project (GG 2231282) to provide solar power, back-up batteries, and a walk-in cooler to a non-profit farmers' co-op on the Caribbean Island of St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands.

The Bordeaux Farmers Market, whose members are organic farmers, now operates completely off the grid! This is a huge economic boon to the producers, members of the non-profit We Grow Food, Inc. (WGFI). They previously endured the double burden of electric costs twice the US average, plus the island's extremely fragile grid subject to frequent blackouts, which further oppress the community through the financial losses from spoiled food. With on-site solar, batteries, and the cooler, the farmers can now keep produce fresh longer, make more money, and provide more food to the community.

The project also illustrates the growing value of ESRAG as a network. All of the international Rotary Club partners found out about it from members who served on ESRAG teams: the Climate, Plant Rich Diet, and Food Waste Task Forces. Hats off to the Rotary Clubs of Ann Arbor North in Michigan, Toledo in Ohio, Boise in Idaho, and Hanalei Bay in Hawaii, as well as Districts 7020, 6380, 6600, and 5400,



and ESRAG's Eastern North America Chapter.

Click "read more" to see the benefits, which Rotarians can replicate in other communities.

Photo: Project partners happily posing in front of the walk-in cooler: (from left) Doug White, Rotary St. Thomas East Eco, Host Club; Eldridge Thomas, President WGFI; Benita Martin, Grant Manager, WGFI; Dee Brown, President, CFVI; Brian Marinelli, CEO, Silver Sun Solar. Photo: Rotary Club of St. Thomas East Eco.

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Outdoor screenings to inspire regenerative farming

By Felix Kimani Kariuki, ESRAG Director and ESRAG Africa Chapter Chair

"Estimates show that emergency relief in famines costs seven times as much as preventing them"

Sam Dryden, Director of the Agricultural Development Program, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation



The arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) in Kenya account for 88% of the total land mass and host 35% of the country's population. The region covers 23 counties and is characterized by harsh climatic conditions, significant environmental degradation, water scarcity, and conflict over access to resources (land, pasture, and water) resulting from prolonged droughts. The region is particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, affecting millions primarily dependent on pastoralism and small-scale farming. It is estimated that at any one time, about two million people living in Kenya's ASAL regions require food assistance - and the number doubles during periods of drought.

In 2022, the Horn of Africa region, which forms part of the Rotary District 9212, experienced one of the worst droughts in recent history due to the failure of four consecutive rainy seasons. Rotary - just as in previous drought events - partnered with the government of Kenya and other stakeholders to support food relief interventions in the affected areas.

Even though food aid interventions are life-saving actions, they are often not sustainable as they do not address the complex food insecurity challenges. Since 2013, the Rotary District 9212, through the Rotary Club of Muthaiga, has partnered with Rotary District 2490 in Israel, to implement a sustainable food security project, with the aim of improving small-scale farmers' livelihoods through the promotion of regenerative agriculture practices as depicted in the movie "Kiss the Ground" on the Loess Plateau, where 14,000 square miles of desertification was recovered over a period of 14 years.

Now, we're encouraging communities across the region to sign up to host **outdoor screenings of "Kiss the Ground"** to inspire the widest possible adoption of regenerative farming practices that will help restore food security to these damaged lands.

Our pilot project, titled: Furrows in the Desert, aimed to support small-scale farming to improve food production and food security in the area, and contribute to local community resilience through income-generating activities and marketing of agricultural products. The project had three integral activities, including

1. Training of 610 farmers from 50 communities in adaptable agricultural methods for arid lands
2. Water infrastructure development, i.e., installation of appropriate water distribution infrastructure and gravity-fed drip irrigation systems; and
3. On-site agronomic support and monitoring of farmers.

Click on "read more" to find out about our impact to date, lessons learned, and plan. If you live in Kenya's ASALs and can host a screening, please [sign up here](#). We're part of an international challenge to set up 1,000 outdoor screenings of this inspiring film.

Slides are from Felix Kimani Kariuki's power point on the Rotary Club of Muthaiga's "Furrows in the Desert" project.
[Read More](#)

We'll help your Club become climate-friendly

By Dr. Michael Koch, ESRAG Europe Chapter Co-Chair

Rotary is successfully acting to make the world a better place. But all Rotarian activities also cause emissions and contribute to climate change. Just think of all the people travelling to the RICON in Melbourne. We do not want reduced activities but we have to do all of them in a clever way! The project "Every Club Climate Friendly - Become Sustainable!" offers you help and solutions. We will help you to make your Rotary or Rotaract Club climate-friendly and sustainable!



We help your club to become climate-friendly & sustainable.

- Calculation of CO₂ footprint (online tool)
- Consulting for your club.
- Presentations about sustainability.
- CO₂ reduction & compensation projects.

Project team:
RAC Barcelona Diagonal (Spain), RAC Bayreuth (GER), RC Bellevue (USA),
RAC Ostfriesland (GER), RC San Jose (USA), RAC München, RC München-Residenz (GER)

We have developed a **CO₂ footprint calculator** that enables clubs to calculate their emissions for all club activities for one Rotary year. The calculator has been translated into **5 languages** already and makes data input very easy. Based on your data, our project team will send you a report and propose actions for your club to reduce CO₂. We will also provide ideas for local or global projects to compensate for and reduce CO₂.

Only 18 months after the start of the project "Every Club Climate Friendly - Become Sustainable!" we have more than **100 interested or participating clubs from 20 countries!**

- If you live in **Africa, Europe, Latin America, or North America**, join now. Scan the QR Code or send an Email to info@becomesustainable.org with your name, your club name and district!
- If you live in **Oceania or Asia**, please send an email waghorne@dcsi.net.au with your name, your club name and district!

You can look back at the last Rotary year to calculate a baseline to use for your club.

We are also looking for additional members to our project team! **Together we will make Rotary climate-friendly and sustainable** - and I have personally promised that I will not rest until we have achieved this!

Climate-friendly in the Caribbean

By Doug White, Rotary Club of St. Thomas East Eco, US Virgin Islands

The Rotary Club of St. Thomas East Eco's President Debbi Jackson welcomed 7020 District Governor (DG) David Kirkaldy to the DGs Annual Visit to the club with a delicious plant-based meal and a review of its environmental projects. "The East Eco meeting was great, and we had a super plant-based meal. The club is doing such a great job by being focused versus trying to be all things to all people," he said.

The completely plant-based, vegan and organic menu (shown here, with



Rotarians digging in enthusiastically) consisted of a kale Caesar salad, eggplant parmesan, vegan mofongo (spicy baked plantains topped with black lentils and home-grown broccoli sprouts - see the recipe in this issue) and a sumptuous vegan cheesecake desert, prepared by Katherine Shegrud and my wife Leslie White and me, local club members of the ESRAG Plant Rich Diet

Task Force. The dinner was enjoyed by all, including the DG, his wife Christina, Assistant DG Heflyn Royer, guests, and club members.

After dinner the club showed a PowerPoint presentation featuring its current environmental projects (click "read more" to discover what they are!)

[Read More](#)

ESRAG recruiting to fill two vital roles

By Laurie Zuckerman, ESRAG Communications Chair

Are you passionate about the environment and want to make a positive impact on the world?

Would you enjoy booking events with speakers from around the globe who are teaching about environmental projects and practices to a global audience?

Would you enjoy working in an international setting, sharing content and visuals you helped produce?

If so, we have an exciting opportunity for you to join our team as either a Part-time Events Coordinator or a Part-time Content Publisher!



Press [Part-time Events Coordinator](#) or [Part-time Content Publisher](#) for job descriptions and pay for this contract work.

Mourning Jorge Aufranc

By Ariel Miller

The ESRAG Board reports with great sorrow the death of their fellow Director Jorge Aufranc of Guatemala on Sept. 5. He was a leader at Rotary's highest levels, including serving as a Rotary International Director, Rotary Foundation Trustee, and on the Council of Legislation. He drew on every one of these roles and relationships to advocate for Rotary's endorsing the environment as an Area of Focus, which the RI Board and Foundation Trustees voted unanimously to approve in June of 2020.



As a member of Rotary's Enhancement Grant Model group, he helped shape Rotary's environmental policy, defining a broad and bold array of actions eligible for Rotary global grants.

Aufranc had just joined ESRAG's board in June of 2023, and was working through his Rotary networks to expand ESRAG's visibility and impact. The loss of his leadership, experience, and connections across the Rotary world is a huge loss to us.

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We will sorely miss Mike Cloutier!

By Ariel Miller

We're devastated to report the death of dedicated Rotarian and ESRAG member Mike Cloutier on September 17. His kindness, IT skill, and resourcefulness have made a giant contribution over the past three years as ESRAG's membership and activities expanded enormously.

Starting at the height of the pandemic, Mike worked with ESRAG IT Chair Mike Terrelonge to customize ESRAG's new iMembers system, setting up the systems we rely on for membership enrollment, communications, event scheduling and registration. He also organized training sessions on iMember's key tools.

Over the subsequent years Mike Cloutier dedicated countless hours listening to, troubleshooting, and imparting confidence to ESRAG leaders as we have been learning to use the tools. To this he brought years of experience managing IT systems and teams in the US Navy, the private sector, and Rotary.

"His contributions were wonderful," says ESRAG Director and Technology Chair Mike Terrelonge, who teamed up with Mike Cloutier and DACdb staff to ensure ESRAG could successfully navigate this transition.

Photo: one of Lori Cloutier's favorite pictures of Mike.

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Announcing: Rotary Fellowship of Vegans!

By Kris Cameron, ESRAG Plant-Rich Diet Task Force

When Rotary leaders Ambaree Majumder (Singapore), Jose Alberto Oliveira (Portugal), and Haresh Mirchandani (Jamaica) met face to face for the first time at the Rotary International Convention in Melbourne, they wanted to create a community in the Rotary family for vegans, the vegan-curious, and those transitioning to a vegan lifestyle. The Rotary Fellowship of Vegans was born from their idea and desire to offer a fun opportunity to share and learn about a vegan lifestyle, which involves more than eating a plant-based diet. Future plans include a vegan food tour for Fellowship members at the 2024



Rotary International Convention in Singapore.

The Vegan Fellowship welcomes new members. [Register here](#). You can also contact them via email: rotaryvegans@gmail.com.

Photo: a selfie of Rotary Fellowship of Vegans President Ambaree Majumdar enjoying a gorgeous plant-based meal.

Go Caribbean with Vefongo! (October plant-rich recipe)

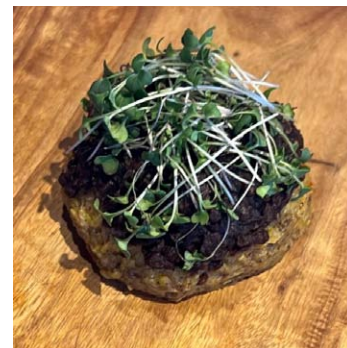
By Doug White

Here's a great Caribbean recipe, part of the vegan, organic menu St. Thomas East Eco Club served to District 7020 Governor David Kirkaldy during his visit this summer. "The St. Thomas East Eco meeting was great, and we had a super plant-based meal. The club is doing such a great job by being focused vs trying to be all things to all people," said DG David.

Vefongo is a plant-based variation of Mofongo, a classic Puerto Rican plaintain dish. Our version is topped with lentils and sprouts. This recipe serves 4-6 people, depending on the size of the plantains. For your health and our rivers' and oceans' health, please buy organic whenever possible.

Here's how to make Vefongo.

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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.
