

While things have changed since that time, they haven't changed enough. Some clubs close themselves off instead of "embracing the world with open arms." Young people aren't necessarily treated with respect and people with different ideas and backgrounds aren't always made to feel welcome. He urged members to think about how they could better welcome others.

"You never know whose Rotary story might begin — or end — based on the way you make them feel at a meeting or service project."

"The Board of Directors has set a goal of increasing membership to 1.25 million Rotarians and 125,000 Rotaractors by our 125th anniversary in 2030. Reaching that goal begins with all of us."

"Another way members can focus on personal change is to aim to do better than their best." He urged district leaders to examine their past successes in raising funds, planning projects, and recruiting members. Then they should challenge themselves to surpass their past triumphs."

There are many ways to **Create Lasting Impact**. Across the globe, it means we must deliver on our promise to eradicate polio and leverage the full benefit of our Rotary Peace Centers.

In your clubs and districts, it means welcoming more people and doing our part to meet our 2030 membership goal.

"When we change ourselves, we change our clubs and districts. When we change our districts, we change the communities we serve. And when we change our communities, we **Create Lasting Impact** across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves."

Compiled and adapted from the 2026-27 Rotary International President's address by Rotary Centre in Thailand.



Olayinka Hakeem Babalola
President, Rotary International
Nigeria

Olayinka Hakeem Babalola received a university degree in engineering and is regional safety manager responsible for Shell Petroleum's upstream oil and gas activities in sub-Saharan Africa and chair of the board of directors of Riviera Nigeria Ltd., an oil and gas engineering consortium.

Babalola began his Rotary journey in 1984 as a Rotaractor. He joined the Rotary Club of Trans Amadi 10 years later. His leadership roles include serving as district governor (2011-12), RI vice president (2019-20), and member of the RI Board (2018-20). He was also an active leader and participant in RI committees such as the End Polio Now Countdown to History Campaign Committee (2017-23) and the Nigeria National PolioPlus Committee (2013-present, adviser 2016-present).

Babalola has served Rotary as an endowment/major gifts adviser, RI training leader, member of the Rotary Foundation Cadre of Technical Advisers, committee member, and president's representative.

Babalola and his wife, Preba, live in the city of Port Harcourt. He supports The Rotary Foundation with a named endowment and as an Arch Klumph Society member. A trustee of ShelterBox UK, he is a recipient of the Africa Centennial Heroes Award, the Regional Service Award for a Polio-Free World, the RI Service Above Self Award, and The Rotary Foundation Citation for Meritorious Service.

2026-27

PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

Olayinka Hakeem Babalola
President, Rotary International
2026-27

**CREATE
LASTING
IMPACT**

2026-27 ROTARY INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Rotary International President-elect Olayinka H. Babalola called on Rotary members to **Create Lasting Impact** by making their clubs more welcoming, carrying out impactful projects, and allowing their Rotary experiences to transform them personally.

“Rotary has changed us. It has shaped who we are and made us better people,” Babalola said at International Assembly in Orlando, Florida, USA, on 12 January 2026. “We often talk about changing the world. We talk about ending polio, about building peace. We do not think enough about how Rotary transforms us.”

Joining a Rotaract club as a teenager enlarged his perspective beyond the limited, privileged outlook he'd once had. That change in awareness came from observing the lasting impact his club had in the community, particularly from teaching people to read and write.



UNDERSTANDING IMPACT

Rotary members have made an impact by expanding early childhood education in Knysna, South Africa, and increasing access to prenatal care in Nigeria, Babalola said. The Rotary Club of Knysna empowered local women to open and manage early childhood education centers.

“The project has reached thousands of children and families, and it will continue to provide education in those communities for generations,” Babalola said. “We can recreate this kind of impact in other parts of the world, and in doing so we can earn the trust and recognition of our neighbors in the communities we serve. And when more communities trust Rotary, more people want to join.”

He described the wide-ranging impact of Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria which caused the wide-ranging impact. The initiative to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality rates received a US\$2 million Rotary Programs of Scale grant in 2022. “I could see clearly how the project would transform lives across Nigerice for decades.

That is what I mean when I say **lasting impact.**”

“As members of Rotary, we share a vision of a better future,” he said. “To make this vision a reality, we must acknowledge and unleash the change within ourselves. We must focus not only on outcomes, but on impact.” He added, “Change and impact are not the same. Change is only the beginning. Impact is what endures.”



EXTENDING A WELCOME

“Young people’s views are not always respected. People from different backgrounds or with different ideas are not always made to feel welcome. And when that happens, we lose potential members before they even get started.”

Babalola urged members to take a more open, welcoming attitude toward newcomers to their clubs. He revealed the experience when he was a Rotaract club member and eager to join a Rotary club, but the club president treated him with scorn, “What audacity! You cannot just join. You need an invitation.” So he said, “I didn’t know a *child* needed an invitation to enter his *parents’* home.” Eventually, one member sponsored him.

Rotary has changed since then. But some clubs still hide behind closed doors instead of embracing the world with open arms.