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When Global Health Needs Global Citizenship

The impending withdrawal of the United States from the World Health Organization, set to take effect in January 2026, marks a defining moment for global public health. As one of WHO's largest contributors steps away, concerns naturally arise over funding gaps, weakened coordination, and reduced capacity to respond to pandemics, disease surveillance, and health emergencies. This moment underscores a critical truth: global health security cannot rely on governments alone.

In this evolving landscape, organizations like Rotary International assume heightened importance. Rotary's strength lies in its independence from political cycles and its deep grassroots presence across more than 200 countries and territories. Whether combating polio, supporting immunization drives, improving maternal and child health, or ensuring access to clean water and sanitation, Rotary's work continues uninterrupted by geopolitical shifts.

Rotary's decades-long leadership in the global fight against polio stands as a powerful example of how sustained civil society action can achieve what once seemed impossible. By mobilizing volunteers, partnering with global institutions, and investing in local capacity-building, Rotary has helped reduce polio cases by over 99 percent worldwide. This model of collaboration and continuity is precisely what the global health ecosystem needs today.

As multilateral institutions face uncertainty, service organizations provide stability, trust, and community-level engagement—often reaching populations that formal systems cannot. The potential weakening of global health structures must be met with stronger citizen-led action, ethical leadership, and cross-border solidarity.

In times of transition and challenge, Rotary reminds the world that public health is not merely a policy issue—it is a shared human responsibility, best protected when service rises above politics.

Subhojit Roy

United Nations and Rotary Celebrate 80th Anniversary of UN Charter

Leaders affirm their organizations' historic, enduring relationship

By *Etelka Lehoczky*



Rotary International President Francesco Arezzo sits with his partner, Anna Maria Arezzo-Criscione, at Global Goals, Local Action: Rotary Commemorates the United Nations at 80, 11 December 2025. Credit: Rotary International

Members of Rotary International joined representatives of the United Nations on 11 December to observe a key milestone in the quest for global solidarity: The 80th anniversary of the signing of the UN charter. Leaders from both organizations reflected on and reaffirmed the principles the UN stands for.

“In the 1940s, when the world was torn apart by war, visionary people began to ask the most urgent questions of all: ‘How could trust be rebuilt across borders where violence had reigned? And how would humanity guard itself against repeating its own worst mistakes?’” said Rotary International President Francesco Arezzo. “In that pivotal moment, Rotary was one of the few organizations in the world that stepped forward with both hope and ideas.”

Rotary members served as official observers at the UN Charter Conference in 1945. They helped create agendas, proposed wording for resolutions, and mediated disputes between delegates.

The event, which took place in the building where the charter was signed in San Francisco, California, USA, was a moment to acknowledge a long-standing relationship and inspire future efforts. Committing to collective action has never been more crucial, said Melissa Fleming, UN/United Nations under-secretary-general for global communications. With the 2030 deadline for the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals fast approaching, she said, there’s still a long way to go.

“Raging conflicts, deepening inequality, runaway technologies, and a burning planet: None of these problems will fix themselves. And no one nation can fix them alone,” she said.

Cyril Noirtin, dean of the **Rotary Representative Network**, said the values that the UN and Rotary share are threatened as never before.

“Today, multilateralism faces serious challenges,” he said. “Political tensions, declining funding, and weak commitments threaten global cooperation when it is needed most.”

But there are signs of progress and hope, Fleming said. She noted that the number of girls in school is at a record high, and graduation rates for all students are rising. HIV infection rates are down, as are maternal and child mortality rates. And 1.5 billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty since 1990.

“Momentum is building,” she said. “When we boost education, we boost gender equality. When we stabilize the climate, we strengthen food security. When we fight famine, we pave the way for peace. This progress doesn’t happen by accident. It is the result of hard work, by real people, day in, day out.”

That’s the kind of work Rotary members can do, Noirtin said.

Rotary’s relationship with the UN has been strong since Rotary members were invited to participate in the charter conference.

Stettinius’ prediction was fulfilled, and Rotary’s unique relationship with the UN has endured. Through the decades, Rotary members have worked alongside UN agencies in areas ranging from global health to peace building to environmental protection. Rotary’s quest to eradicate polio has received crucial support from the UN, with the World Health Organization and UNICEF serving with Rotary as partners in the **Global Polio Eradication Initiative**. In 2023, a new collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme empowered Rotary and Rotaract members to clean up, protect, and monitor their local waterways.

The UN’s wide-ranging impact may be taken for granted today, but there was a time when it was difficult to imagine. Arezzo asked attendees to put themselves in the place of those who were present at the charter signing. Those men audaciously insisted that lasting peace was possible amid the ashes of a worldwide war.

“Imagine those early Rotarians in San Francisco trying to articulate what a peaceful world might look like. Their words were fragile but powerful, as if they were lighting a lantern in a world still full of smoke,” Arezzo said. “And yet they saw beyond the ruins. They believed that peace could be built, not only by treaties, but by the quiet, steady courage of people who chose connection over division.”

John Hewko : Civic Organizations in Chicago Hold a Crucial Key to the UN's Future

This article originally appeared in the *Chicago Tribune's* Opinion Section © 2025 Chicago Tribune

By *John Hewko*



Brigadier General Carlos P. Romulo, a Rotary member, resident commissioner of the Philippines to the United States, and chair of the Delegation to the Philippines Commonwealth, signs the UN Charter at a ceremony held at the Veteran's War Memorial Building in San Francisco, California, USA, on 26 June 1945.

Photo courtesy of UN Photo/Yould

Conference, many Americans embraced “America First” isolationism and were skeptical of global governance. In response, Rotary and many large international civic organizations were tasked by the U.S. government with a critical mission: using their global reach to broaden public support for an intergovernmental organization dedicated to fostering cooperation, maintaining peace, and addressing global challenges. Through conferences and membership publications, Rotary promoted this visionary concept of a world body that promised to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”

Their efforts paid off. When delegates from 50 nations gathered in San Francisco in 1945 to negotiate and finalize what became the UN Charter, the U.S. State Department invited Rotary and 41 other nongovernmental organizations to serve as consultants and technical advisers during the negotiations.

These NGOs were not mere observers. They brought persuasive advocacy and specialized expertise that helped shape the treaty. Their future role was ultimately enshrined in Article 71 of the UN Charter, which authorizes the Economic and Social Council to establish formal channels for consultation with NGOs. This provision ensured that civil society would have an institutional voice within the UN system.

Although the UN initially functioned primarily as a forum for sovereign states, the global landscape has changed dramatically over the past eight decades. Civic organizations have expanded rapidly at the local and national levels—particularly in developing countries—and today they represent a powerful “third force” in international affairs.

Civic organizations amplify citizen concerns, monitor compliance with international agreements, and help implement them. They bridge the gap between global policy and everyday life through public campaigns, community programs, and initiatives such as Model UN.

Perhaps most importantly, they bring scale. Rotary operates in more than 200 countries and geographic areas, mobilizing millions of volunteers. Rotary became a founding partner of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in 1988, alongside the WHO, UNICEF, and others. As a result of this collaboration, global polio cases have fallen by 99.9 percent. Many civic organizations also align their work with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, advancing progress on inequality, climate change, hunger, public health, and education. They promote peace by addressing root causes of conflict, such as poverty, lack of opportunity, and injustice, through joint development projects with UN agencies and people-to-people exchanges, including youth programs and international scholarships. Their efforts also include mediating dialogue as neutral parties and delivering humanitarian aid.

At this critical moment for the UN and its agencies, civic organizations must continue to do what they do best: educate

The United States officially began its withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO) earlier this year through a presidential executive order. Under the mandatory one-year notice period, the U.S. exit from the WHO and the cessation of funding would take effect around January 22, 2026.

At the same time, many governments are retreating from the globalism that defined the post-Cold War era and are reducing financial support for UN agencies, which now face deep funding shortfalls.

As the United Nations confronts an existential crisis, community groups that played an important role in the UN's founding and have long enjoyed close partnerships with the institution, must once again step up to help the world body navigate its current challenges.

The term “United Nations” first appeared in the 1942 Declaration by United Nations, a document signed by 26 Allied nations during World War II as an attempt to prevent future global conflicts. Two years later, delegations from the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China met in Washington, D.C., to develop a proposal for the structure of this global peace-making body.

In the period leading up to the 1945 UN Charter

the public, mobilize grassroots networks to support the UN's work, use storytelling to shape public opinion, and advocate with governments and legislatures to sustain financial commitments.

We will also continue partnering with the UN by leveraging our on-the-ground networks to provide access, sharing specialized expertise in areas such as health, food, and shelter, and using our agility and community trust to deliver aid during disasters and conflicts. Just as importantly, NGOs can help raise funds to fill the gaps left by governments. Between 2024 and 2025, Rotary was among the largest contributors to the World Health Organization.

In a world marked by conflict and political polarization, the United Nations remains a beacon of hope for millions. The WHO embodies that hope through science and global cooperation against health threats. Our longstanding partnership with the UN demonstrates how much stronger the world can be when citizens and governments work together.

John Hewko is a lawyer, public policy scholar, and serves as CEO of Rotary International.

Club News

Thalassaemia Awareness



On 16th December 2025, Rotary Club of Calcutta Metro City conducted a thalassaemia awareness session for 60 plus girls and their mothers. The program was in association with IPER and PP Rtns Jharna Mitra, Arindam Ghosh, Rajnish Kapoor, Dipu Mullick and Rtn Deepanwita Banerjee attended the program where PP Rtn Subhojit Roy was the resource person.

Metro Mail wishes its a readers a Very Happy New Year!!

