

A Rotary Paradox - Yemen

Can some one explain to me please why on one hand RI concerns itself with the alleviation of poverty and ensuring the supply of clean water to developing countries around the world, when at the same time we sit back and, without any form of protest, allow the governments of two Western nations (the USA and the UK) in which Rotarians are prominently represented, undertake a total blockade of Yemen to deny its population fresh food, fuel and water, all in support of Saudi Arabia, a country in which Rotary Clubs are not allowed to be established! Meanwhile, my country Australia is also giving tactic support to this regime! The tragedy is that this supportive action by our Western nations could well lead to the worst famine and human disease scenario seen globally for many decades. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-coalition-naval-blockade-turns-yemen-humanitarian-disaster-hrw-1105852654>

Cannot our Rotary leaders at least say something and speak out about this impending disaster and persuade our political leaders to take immediate action to address this humanitarian disaster!
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[Saudi-led naval blockade turns Yemen into a 'humanitarian disaster': HRW](#)
[The Saudi coalition's naval blockade has halted the flow of fuel that is needed to power hospitals and water treatment plants](#)

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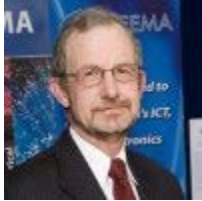


- **J Armando Jeronimo** What you proposed is banned from Rotarian life because it might throw one club against another. The example you bring forward is very clear cut but what if Australian clubs protested against Argentinian attempt to take Falkland/Malvinas islands from the UK? How would Argentinian Rotarians feel? And Brazilian Rotarians, which side would take?

Rotarians can of course take action to force governments to stand against this kind of problem but in their capacity of citizens of a democratic country not as club members. Show less

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• **Angus M Robinson** Armando, thank you for taking the trouble to comment. What I proposed was simply, "Cannot our Rotary leaders at least say something & speak out about this impending disaster & persuade our political leaders to take immediate action to address this humanitarian disaster" With respect, there is nothing in the Rotary charter which would prevent Rotary leaders to speak out about this issue. What I am simply pointing out is that lack of action by RI leaders in encouraging governments to take preventative action to ward off disasters occurring cuts right across Rotary's role in undertaking large scale aid efforts.

If on the other hand, Rotary prefers to remain silent and take no preventative action, but simply try to fix up the mess in the aftermath, then our credibility as a truly committed humanitarian organisation is open to question and we remain simply a business networking club, and a toothless tiger to boot! By early affirmative action, surely RI can help make the difference! Show less

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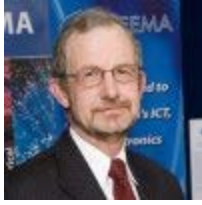


• **Peter Lattey** Tough question. I wish I knew the solution for Yemen but I don't. I think that the answer lies in the quiet diplomacy that individual Rotarians and Rotary as a body practice. We can, and do work to support international institutions like the UN and UNICEF and work with other NGO's. Our Peace scholar program trains individuals in Peacemaking. These are long term efforts that pay dividends over the years. When the leaders of any nation are determined to beat the drums of war, we can use our power as citizens there to talk of peace. But even though it is much easier to wage war than peace, we still wage peace wherever and however we can.

Our humanitarian work shows people everywhere that the world does care about them and that alone can give them hope and the will to struggle for peace. Show less

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Angus M Robinson Peter, thank you for your thoughtful response about which I am in total agreement. However, I do feel that Rotarians worldwide might be more incentivised if they saw their Leaders taking more of a public stand on these issues when they cut across the humanitarian aspirations of Rotary as a whole. Rotary has a global army of followers of over one million people in number, a body politic which can exercise influence on the actions of politicians. IMHO, remaining silent achieves very little and provides no curbs on political actions which are anti-humanitarian in nature. Show less

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Jay McCall, GRI, SFR, SGSB This is a "sticky wicket" for Rotary as it is a disadvantage of being an international organization doing "good deeds." With the United Nations connection and elsewhere, Rotary can best work behind the scenes. Directly it can do nothing. Making political statements would help destroy the advantage of having developed into an organization with diverse cultures having Rotary clubs and members. Show less

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Angus M Robinson Sticky wicket indeed. No evidence of RI working with the UN - if it is, it is not reported to Rotarians through internal media. In short, with respect, Rotary appears to do nothing either directly or indirectly in an environment where other major charitable organisations are agitating about something being done to avert a major humanitarian disaster occurring - with respect, this is hardly the stuff of making political statements rather speaking out about lack of government action in ensuring that people don't unnecessarily starve to death or are afflicted by widespread cholera; as the great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi once said about poverty, "empty bellies know no politics".

How can we as Rotarians sit in front of our TV sets every night and watch this dreadful disaster unfolding without at least believing that our organisation is doing whatever it can, albeit speaking out publicly, to proactively address this situation! Show less

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• **Raymond Metz** Dear Angus,

Since rotary stands for an non-political and non-confessional organisation, their leaders avoid to interfere publicly in politics or religion. Rotary is very active in the UN. Two weeks ago rotarians from all over the world met with United Nations members from all over the world , at the UN building in Geneva. There was a peace conference where rotarians participated in meetingsessions and discussions. I believe that the diplomatic course of our rotarian leaders has an impact. There are many politicians in the USA and the UK who are rotarians. If they ask themselves the questions from the rotarian 4-way test, the problem you are addressing should be obsolete . Their influence within governments is limited however.Show less

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• **Stephen Phillips, Lord of Ballinaboy** No politics.....No religion! What next.....BIRTH CONTROL!

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• **Angus M Robinson** Again, great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi once said about poverty, "empty bellies know no politics". And I am sure that the Yemen people will be able to understand Rotary's hallowed position of 'avoidance' and doing nothing whilst people die from starvation, dehydration and disease!

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- **Amanda Wood** This is a facinating discussion, and cuts to heart of why I decided to discontinue my journey down the Rotary pathway. I became disillusioned at the effect that Rotary was truely able to have with regards to their humanitarian efforts. While the work being done is incredible and admirable, I struggle to see the true change that I think can, and should occur.Show less
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- **Angus M Robinson** Amanda thank you for your supportive comments. I have been on the Rotary journey for the past 23 years and am now struggling to see how Rotary is able to make the difference in this troubled world. Rotary membership in Australia (which has been decreasing over the past decade or two) has now fallen to below 30,000, a figure which represents barely 0.01% of the Australian population, and less than belongs to a city- based football club. Membership decline is not just restricted to Rotary, but I believe that in Rotary's case, strong forthright leadership on humanitarian issues that really matter have been notably absent, to the extent that Rotary has ceased to be a cause in which belief and allegiance can be maintained and nurtured. In other words, when Rotarians see a desperate human need such as in Yemen, where Rotary is missing in action, core belief in the relevance of Rotary is put to the test. That is where 'the rubber really hits the road'!Show less
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- **Bill Phillips** Angus, you opened with a specific question about why we (RI) sit(s) back and make(s) no public comment about this tragic situation. Without debating the merits of the policy, the answer to your initial question is that RI and iis member clubs are prohibited from engaging in the practice by the Rotary Code of Policies:

2.090. Clubs and Politics

RI and its member clubs must refrain from issuing partisan political statements. Rotarians likewise are prohibited from adopting statements with a view to exerting any corporate

pressure on governments or political authorities.

As many have noted above, this policy does not prohibit individual Rotarians from personally advocating in their respective countries or internationally.

Incidentally, It was Rotary's policy and reputation for political neutrality that enabled Rotary Clubs and their partners to be the first outside agencies allowed into Myanmar for relief operations following the 2004 Tsunami.

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- **Erhard Prantz** Bill it is not the question of engaging on one political side at a conflict, but it is engaging if basic humanitarian rights are neglected or broken.

The red cross is neutral world wide, but it has the courage to say if war crimes are done and its high moral reputation is because it is doing so since more then 100 years but keeping political neutrality.

Killing innocent civilians by cutting water and food is a war crime and nazi commanders had been hanged after WW2 rightfully for such inhuman war crimes.

I am also very disappointed that RI does nothing. Not even ask internally its clubs to support NGOs to bring help to the civilians or try to use their influence on the goverments selling the fighters and weapons to stop using them for war crimes against women and children.

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- **Paul Dutton** The UN and the Aid Agencies like Oxfam have been very active in trying to shift the blockade. Those are the correct voices and I think they are being heard, even if the response is slower than desirable.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/...>Show more

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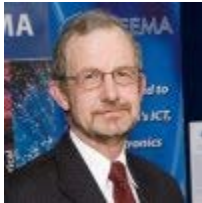
Doug Anthony I'm guessing there will be many comments on this topic over the coming days and weeks. However, it would seem that action, regardless of how small, would provide more support to those suffering in Yemen than any ethical or political procrastination on the part of RI or individual members.

A simple google search produced a number of agencies already operating in Yemen and supporting the local issues - Red Cross, UNHCR, Save the Children, Oxfam - to name a few.

These are agencies we as Rotarians continually raise funds for - so why not continue?Show less

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Angus M Robinson I totally agree with Erhard - as I have already stated, this issue is nought to do with politics but rather about responding to dire humanitarian needs. For those of us who claim adherence to Christian beliefs, I thought this was a central theme of Christianity. If JC was still around, based on his teachings, does anyone really believe that he would tolerate such inaction based on the excuse of not being politically correct?Show less

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Angus M Robinson Doug might I suggest that at one level, if as a charity Rotary takes a back seat, says nothing, and allows other charities to step up to the plate, Rotarians could be forgiven for thinking about shifting their donations directly to these other charities. At a higher level, and arguably far more significantly, it is argued that Rotary should be speaking out publicly in an effort to influence governments not to create these humanitarian disasters.

The discussion is focussing on the extent to which RI finds and then exercises its moral compass, and in doing so defines a rallying call to retain both disaffected members and attract new members to the cause.Show less

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- **Angus M Robinson** Paul thank you for drawing our attention to the report in the Guardian which claims that 'following intense pressure from western governments, Saudi Arabia agreed on Wednesday to lift a fortnight-long blockade of the port of Hodeida from noon on Thursday (sic, last week)', but points out that 'in an update at lunchtime on Friday, aid agencies said no permissions for humanitarian shipments had been given.' The fact that western governments had intervened with intense pressure is very reassuring and a relief to boot!. It would have been nice to have thought that RI had been one of the influencers! Show less
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- **J Armando Jeronymo** Just heard that story on Radio 4 news.
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- **Peter Lattey** Rotary refrains from commenting for the Sam reason that we refrain from commenting on the treatment of people of colour in the USA, the treatment of Aborigines in Australia, the actions of Israel to the Palestinians, the invasion of Iraq, etc etc. it would be counterproductive. Better to work quietly and in a non confrontational way to help humanityShow less
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- **Bill Phillips** Angus, RI policy is clear on this matter. Personally, I am glad that Rotary leadership has, at least publicly, followed its own guidelines and remained silent on the issue. Rotary provides a route through the Council on Legislation to affect changes to RI Policy, so

perhaps you might explore that option.

Abandoning current policy would set Rotary upon a slippery slope that could jeopardize our ability to do good work on the ground. As you noted above, western governments did in fact apply the pressure you have advocated without Rotary's public involvement. We have seen the internal division that was caused when RI inserted itself into the US gun control debate. What would be the reaction in Australia if Rotary were to insert itself into your government's treatment of its aboriginal population? Can we not do what we do best by leaving diplomacy to the diplomats and politics to the politicians? Are we not more effective by setting politics aside and operating at the grass roots level?Show less

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• **Susann Jendricke** Dear Angus, I like your idealism so much. What I observed beside the comfortable rules: RI is made to spray drops on wounds (mostly caused by the capitalistic system - pollution, global warming --> climat change, katastrophes, exploitation of poor countries by neocolonialism) but RI is not made to change the political power structures of the world fundamentally. There is to much profitable involvement of the Rotarians in the current power structures. We Rotarians are part of the capitalistic system who are willing to give something back, but never as much that it could dammage our drop spraying. Best regards from Germany , SusannShow less

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• **Angus M Robinson** Bill I am sorry but remaing silent is not an option. Witness the rise of Naziism in Germany when good and decent Germans remained silent. If Rotary took a stand on addressing indigenious issues in Australia our membership would grow exponentially particularly backed by the younger generation!

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Angus M Robinson Susann thankyou very much for your kind comments. May I add that even if we accept that Rotary is somewhat trapped by the capitalist system, it can still learn from the marketing experience of other charities which understand that people are motivated by interest in causes. Might I suggest that expecting members to collectively donate money to match a relatively minor contribution by the world's richest man (and his good partner) in support of Polio + is hardly an exemplar of best practice cause marketing! I argue that Rotary needs to stand for values and principled actions that enthuse and excite its members. Remaining silent on global humanitarian issues caused by the actions of governments will only exacerbate Rotary's continuing decline as a membership based organisation. Show less

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Bill Phillips Angus, remaining silent is always an option. This is especially true when doing so enables our organization to carry out its mission of peace, goodwill, and understanding in localities that are otherwise not receptive to such ideas.

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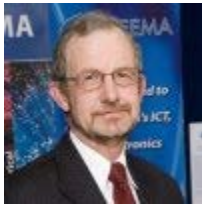
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Scott McKenzie RI should get back to its business networking roots.

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Angus M Robinson Scott, your logic makes a lot of sense. If Rotary is unable to 'walk the talk' on global humanitarian outreach, maybe your suggested approach should be considered! In this context community service programs could logically link to business networking objectives and local business 'community service and responsibility' (CSR).

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• **Alun Hughes** I agree with Bill Phillips .The answer to your question Angus is simple. Rotary started and continues to be Non political and Non religious and it has proven to be one of its strenghts allowing Rotarian volunteers access to work in countries where others have not been allowed or trusted due to their religous or political backgrounds. Rotarys outreach with the polio vacine is a classic example. You can't have it both waysShow less

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• **Angus M Robinson** Alun, thank you for your comment. May I enquire please if you know if Rotary is on the ground in Yemen at present?

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• **Ed Thompson** I believe Saudi Arabia has purchased \$350 Billion worth of military equipment mainly from the USA and some from Canada. I think Rotary should in an informative way point out how much money it would take to eliminate world poverty, starvation, or diseases. I saw a Youtube presentation from Vincente Fox (Past Mexican President) talk about what \$25 Billion would do. Like provide scholarships for 250,000 students, or eliminate world hunger for a year. Provide clean drinking water for everyone in the world for a year. How about disease eradication? Polio likely will end up costing \$5 billion to eradicate. If only 10% of the world's military budget was spent on the Rotary Six areas of focus, I wonder what the returns would be like to humanity. The need for military equipment would diminish pretty fast. 10% of 350 billion is \$35 Billion. What could \$35 billion do for the world if it went towards Rotary's six areas of focus? Why couldn't we take this on as a project?Show less

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John Borst Angus, you ask a question with deep moral implications. It needs asking over and over again. Most Rotarians will cry it's too political just like they are doing here. Such Rotarians believe we must always be neutral even in the face of a pending Yemeni genocide.

There are places where we actually practice quite the opposite. I would title their stories "Never Neutral: Rotarians Putting Others Above Self". The most important, consistent and greatest story is our effort to eradicate Polio. The front line Rotarians in this great battle have not let political opposition, religious ignorance or warring factions stand in the way.

There is a word for what we have done to achieve our goal of a Polio free world. It is "Resistance". Chris Hedges has written (see next post)Show less

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John Borst "Resistance entails suffering. It requires self-sacrifice. It accepts that we may be destroyed. It is not rational. It is not about the pursuit of happiness. It is about the pursuit of freedom. Resistance accepts that even if we fail, there is an inner freedom that comes with defiance, and perhaps this is the only freedom, and true happiness, we will ever know. To resist evil is the highest achievement of human life. It is the supreme act of love. " (see- <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-cost-of-resistance/>)

Angus, that is the kind of Rotarian you are asking us to be. You are asking us to stand with the poverty-stricken, the tired, the hungry and the thirsty; all of them, the very antithesis of what Rotarians are. Resistance is cultural. Our 4-Way Test and 6 Areas of Focus express our culture. When we say we are "neutral" we are expressing our politics. You are correct we stand with the elites when we say nothing about the evil of the blockade; we negate the culture we profess.Show less

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Angus M Robinson John, thank you! Whilst I received quite a few comments professing the adoption of a neutral stand, I have been encouraged by the many Rotarians who indicated that they liked my post suggesting perhaps that it was a question worth asking! Maybe if a RI leader had the courage to speak out, the new members flocking to join Rotary would surpass the

number quitting as a protest vote, and in the process enabling our organisation to have a better chance of finding its moral compass!Show less

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- **John Borst** Angus, as you likely know that has been my theory with respect to Rotary and the issue of guns in the USA. Yes we will lose a significant number of Americans but we will gain many more in the long run. They will be younger and more in tune with Rotary's culture.

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- **Bill Phillips** John, I strongly disagree with your characterization of Rotary accomplishments as "resistance". On the contrary, many of Rotary's greatest accomplishments (including Polio eradication) have been the direct result of cooperation and collaboration. Rotary culture is exemplified by The Object of Rotary and The Four Way Test which very few Rotarians are prepared to abandon.

I must respectfully point out that your latest argument is circular. If it is necessary to risk being destroyed or alienating a significant number of Rotarians by changing Rotary's culture in order to appeal to a younger generation, then it cannot be said that the younger generation will be more in tune with Rotary's culture.

Perhaps you meant to say that the changed Rotary culture you envision might be more in tune with a younger generation?Show less

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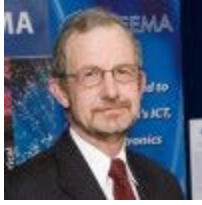
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- **Angus M Robinson** Bill, perhaps it is a question of Rotary 'humanitarian' values rather than culture. The issue surely is whether or not Rotary world wide is acting at every opportunity to fulfill the aspirations of those who treasure those values, no matter in what age group they belong.

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Angus M Robinson The latest reports from the UN indicate that the USA, the UK and France are continuing to support the Saudi imposed blockade, thus ensuring that essential aid including funds are not being delivered to alleviate the suffering of people in Yemen. Just imagine the global impact, if Rotary leaders, speaking on behalf of Rotarians globally, stepped into the breach and declared that Rotary could no longer remain silent and urged the Western Powers to persuade the Saudis to lift the blockade. My bet is that Rotarians everywhere would respond favourably and have something else to tell friends other than the somewhat 'worn out' Polio Plus story!Show less

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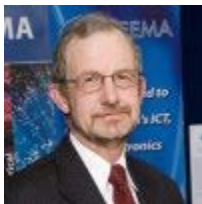
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Bill Phillips Angus, if the widespread Rotarian support you suggest is true, you should have no problem getting clubs and districts to petition the Council on Legislation to rescind RI Policy that prohibits such statements. Just as RI's governing documents prohibit RI from taking corporate actions that attempt to affect the policies of a government, they also provide the mechanism for effecting the paradigm shift in policy you advocate.Show less

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Angus M Robinson Thank you Bill for identifying a mechanism that could initiate a change in direction in Rotary policy formulation and implementation. Given that this discussion so far has elicited a similar number of supportive and not so supportive responses to the question I proposed in the original posting, at least it has got people thinking about the issues involved. Timing in the process of implementing reform is critical. I humbly suggest that when the membership of Rotary declines to a certain 'tipping point', Rotary Leaders may well start asking what is it we need to do to motivate Rotarians to continue their membership and to attract new Rotarians to the fold. I recall the well know expression we at least use in Australia, the tipping point is reached when 'when the proverbial hits the fan!'Show less

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- **Kilong Ung** Why isn't this post sharable?
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- **Angus M Robinson** Kilong I don't believe that you are able to share a LinkedIn discussion group posting outside of the group. To share a discussion group posting, I guess the only option available to a LinkedIn member is to initiate your own posting from your LinkedIn home page in which you include a 'copy and paste' of the original posting. However others in our discussion group may have other solutions to the question you have posed. Show less
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- **Bill Phillips** Kilong, you can click on the discussion header to open in a separate tab, then copy the URL as a link into another discussion. I have done this below:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/858557/858557-6338665005692612611>

This works for anyone... Show more

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- **Angus M Robinson** Thank you Bill :)
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- **Himansu Basu** Rotary responds to community needs identified as a priority humanitarian need ,by local Rotarians who seek help. There is no Rotary in Yemen or Saudi Arabia. I am struggling to find out cogent reasons for intervention through advocacy,when there are so many other examples of atrocities in this world. Do we have the capacity to parachute ourselves to countries where Rotary does not exist ?Show less

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- **Angus M Robinson** Himansu has raised an interesting point. From what I can gather, Rotary's response to any global humanitarian crisis is not predicated on whether or not there are any Rotary clubs located in an affected area, but I stand corrected if I am mistaken. Certainly it is true that the implementation of programs such as ShelterBox and Disaster Aid are enhanced by the presence of Rotary clubs on the ground.

However, the issue raised in this posting is focused on the need or otherwise for Rotary to be seen to be vocal in influencing the decisions of governments which are involved in actually causing humanitarian rather than natural disasters per se. In the Yemen situation, the nations supporting the Saudi blockade are principally the US, the UK and France all of which are countries in which Rotary clubs are well established.Show less

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- **Angus M Robinson** Himansu, FYI, I have identified that Rotary has been active in Yemen in respect of the Polio Plus project http://www.wju.edu/about/adm_news_story.asp?iNewsID=2329&strBack=/about/adm_news_archive.asp
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