



INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY TRIS COFFIN

President George, it sure got there in a hurry, didn't it. He is a very dear friend. My fellow Officers, Johnny, Harry, and Fernando Sobral, International Directors, Past International Presidents, fellow Lions, and lovely ladies: At this time if you would bear with me for just a very brief moment or two, I would like to address a few words in French to the many Lions in my home District who traveled many miles to be with me on this occasion. (Speech in French by Tris Coffin)

Thank you very much. Lions, we hold in our hands the most amazing and world-shaking opportunity that any Lions in history have ever faced. Today we are more than one million strong. In nearly 150 nations and geographical territories around this world the men of more than 26,000 Lions Clubs are at work. The challenge I present to you today, fellow Lions, is to draw even closer together in a worldwide cooperative program for greater and more definitive service to the needy and under privileged people of the earth. What has gone before us is history. What faces us now is tomorrow.

The foundation for the future work of our Association has been laid, and is firmly embedded in all societies of the free world. Our size, the variety of services that Lionism provides mankind, and the new organizational restructuring of our International Headquarters' services during the past year, provide us with an even greater capacity for worldwide service to mankind. The challenge I issue to you today is to join with me in reasserting ourselves on behalf of International Lionism. We are "one million men serving mankind." (Applause)

I ask that this become our cry and our purpose during 1973-74. I ask that we embark upon a concerted program to better promote international understanding and cooperation throughout the world. Is such a program possible? I believe that it is. The continuing efforts of a truly professional Headquarters staff, working under the direction of our International Board of Directors, assures us that our programs to build and broaden international activities will be timely and meaningful to the world of today. Through the size of our membership we have the manpower, through the structural network of 26,000 active clubs, we have the facilities, and through the experience and wisdom of our new and Past International Officers and Directors, we have the guidance and the leadership.

Yes, we do have a marvelously united capability to look beyond our horizons. By "horizons," I mean that we must, if this program for improved international understanding and cooperation is to succeed, we must look beyond the day-to-day, beyond the month-to-month, beyond the year-to-year activities of our clubs, and our Districts, and yes, even Lions International. For this program to succeed, we must look beyond the boundaries of our nations. It is the contention of Lionism that a Lion is a man who is "involved with mankind."

The implication of that statement is that we are involved with every man, woman and child on the face of this earth. "Mankind" means all of humanity; it means all people everywhere. To fulfill this total commitment to mankind, therefore, each Lions club must perform as a citizen of the world, as well as of a citizen of its community and of its nation. He must be a man who recognizes that his responsibilities extend to all the less fortunate people of the world. There is, and there always has been, in my mind, a visible difference between a man who is a Lions club member, and a man who can truly call himself a Lion.

In my travels throughout the world, I have spoken to many of you in your own clubs, in your own areas, about this subject, and you may, and certainly will recognize some of these thoughts and words, but I feel they are worth repeating. Each of us who have joined a Lions club has been resented with a lapel pin and told that we are members of a community service organization called a Lions Club. But as each of us has continued his work in Lionism, we have learned that it takes more, much more, than a lapel button and a short ceremony to make us a real Lion.

Eventually, we have learned that true Lionism is worn a little further down, and a little deeper inside of us than just our coat lapels; we have learned that true Lionism is "a language of the heart. For that's where it all begins. And, this "language of the heart," of which I speak, is the language that we can use to build this program of international understanding and cooperation.

For when we communicate with this marvelous language, all barriers between people, such as religious differences and cultural differences, immediately disintegrate. It is because all Lions, all one million of us, speak with this language of the heart, that I believe we can exercise our "strength" as a strong and continuing force for international cooperation and better understanding. Now, how can we put this common "language of the heart" to its most effective use on behalf of international understanding? We can accomplish it at its most basic level; "within our minds." this is where it starts, here in our heads. We accomplish it by starting to "think internationally."

Thinking internationally, however, is indeed an art, and it is an art that is mastered by far too few people in the world today. I believe that if more people could apply themselves to it, we would have far less trouble and chaos in the world than we have at the present time. There is a very definite link between thinking internationally and good leadership in our time. Neither activists nor limited leadership is in itself the answer to the turmoil in which we find ourselves today. We do require the making of mature decisions by leaders who are willing to risk them, but we must also be aware, as they must be aware, that unless we are willing to expose ourselves and to train ourselves to "thinking internationally," and then to act accordingly, we can do nothing to reduce the current turmoil of the world.

We Lions gathered here today must become involved in and exposed to, thinking internationally. However, this is a goal that requires certain qualifications. It requires courage; it requires considerable tolerance, diplomacy, spirited cooperation, and fearless individualism. To "think internationally" about the role of Lionism in the world today, we must recognize a most basic fact. Lions International, fellow Lions, is not American. And Lions International is not Canadian, nor is it German, nor Japanese, nor Portuguese, nor Swedish. Lions International is not the property of any single nation or any single race color. It is because it is not only one of these that we succeed. It is the reason why we have become one million strong.

Lionism is the property of all men who believe that there is some good in other men. Indeed it is why it is possible for us here today, for all Lions everywhere, to be exposed to think internationally. How do we as individual Lions - excuse me, how do we as individual human beings, "think internationally?" I would like to offer seven specific points, which embody my personal ideas on this subject. You are thinking internationally when you show a sincere interest in other people; when you make other people feel superior, or at least equal, but never inferior; when you give recognition to others; when you compliment others freely; when you make a point of trying to understand the other person's viewpoint; when you are genuinely enthusiastic; and the last point, when you put aside superficial differences, and learn to live with your fellow man on a heart to heart basis. (Applause)

In other words, use this "language of the heart" that all Lions share. It is indeed a pity that while most people gives lip service to the concept of the brotherhood of man, that far too many do not give this idea a part of their daily living. Animosities and stupid prejudices continue to raise barriers between people, and no amount of legislation can ever change human natures. Only a specialized type of education can influence the attitude that one man has for another. And I truly believe that at least an effort to "think internationally" is part of that specialized education. (Applause)

As Lions, members of the world's largest service club organization, how can we put this concept of thinking internationally to work? How can we make it useful? There are within our present framework of Lions International, nine specific activities that provide the foundation for a concerted effort on behalf of "international understanding and cooperation." Upon these nine existing activities, we can build stronger international relationships between nations, between Lions International Districts, between Lions clubs and yes, even between individual Lions club members. These nine activities form the substance of my program as your International President during the coming year.

I urge and plead for your cooperation in helping me to build increased participation in these activities. When you return home to your own nations and Districts and clubs, please help me to stimulate deeper involvement with these activities, for they are the groundwork upon which each of us here today can build greater understanding between all people of the world. I shall very briefly describe these nine activities. I ask that you consider each of them in relation to your own club. District, and Multiple District programs, and that during the coming year, you seek to encourage and to build support for them.

Number 1: Youth Exchange. For many years now, Lions clubs around the world, to become part of a family in another country, has sponsored many hundreds of young people. Youth Exchange programs are much more than simply providing a youngster with a vacation, each Youth Exchange visitor to another nation actually lives with a host family, and shares in its daily lives. All who have participated in this activity have praised it as an outstanding vehicle for increasing and broadening international understanding between people. Have you participated?

Number two: the Lions international Foundation. This relatively new program has already proved its value twice during the past year. When floods, hurricanes and earthquakes struck parts of the world, Lions from many nations used the Foundation as a means of providing relief to people suffering from the disasters. This Foundation of ours is truly a new concept in total world service, for it takes advantage of the

structure of our Association to achieve its end; it provides an ideal means for the Lions of one nation to assist the Lions of another. The six major objectives of our Foundation are: vocational assistance abroad; major disaster and emergency relief; eye care and research; cancer; hearing; and humanitarian services; these were adopted only after examining how our Association could help contribute to the solution of these global problems. Have you participated?

The third one: *International Contacts.* A Lions club can establish and maintain contact and build friendly relations with a club in another country in many different ways. The key to the success of an international contact is a free exchange of communication between the clubs; this exchange can include correspondence, club bulletins, magazines, newspapers, or anything, which builds mutual understanding of each club's nation and culture. This is really one of the easiest international projects to start. Every club secretary receives an annual International Directory. It's a simple matter to select a club in another nation with whom you and your fellow club members would like to communicate. Have you tried to participate?

And the fourth: *International Assistance Projects.* In all existing Lion - Lions programs, perhaps none so clearly demonstrates the full meaning of international thinking than those projects, which provide aid to needy people in different parts of the world. International Assistance projects come in many shapes and forms. Libraries and schools in remote areas of developing countries; eyeglasses; surgical and medical equipment; the list is endless. Through these programs, we had a major opportunity to not only fulfill our basic commitment to humanitarian service, but also to build the ties that will lead to stronger and more cooperative understanding between nations of different cultures. Have you participated?

The fifth: *United Nations.* As you know, Lions International currently holds a consultative status on the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the world body created to coordinate a network of commissions, committees and specialized agencies working to improve the condition of man. Our support of these activities offers yet another means of thinking internationally. Because with our support, these projects do, in every way, help create a better world for all mankind. Have you participated?

Sixth: *Lions CARE Program.* At this moment, as we gather here in this auditorium, somewhere in a developing nation, a school or a library is being constructed by CARE, and has been financed by Lions. The accomplishments of CARE in bringing relief and aid to the needy and underprivileged are legendary. Since 1957, Lions International has been a major supporter of CARE programs. If we are to think internationally, this is one of the most important areas where our continued support will help build international cooperation and understanding. Have you participated in this one?

Seven: *Scholarships Abroad.* Lions clubs in developed nations have, for many years, cooperated with fellow Lions in developing nations, to provide scholarships to deserving students. The unique aspect of this program is that the student receives the training that he desires at home, in his own nation, where he may do the most good. A most important side benefit of this program is that students may well become the leaders of their own nations. Seldom will they ever forget the help and assistance that was made available to them by the Lions of another nation. International understanding, that is the whole essence of the scholarships abroad program.

Eighth: Hands Across Borders. Let us not forget the importance of our international relations with neighboring nations. Joint cooperative programs between neighboring countries have proven a most effective means of cementing international relations and creating an even greater mutual understanding between nations. One participating member of a hand across borders program learns from the other. Together, they can lend even greater assistance to problems that are common to each nation. *Have you participated?*

The last one is Lions Twinning Program called Jumalage. Today club twinning is one of the most popular international programs in Lionism. Many, many nations around the world have enrolled in this program, and in so doing have built firm bonds of friendships that often have endured across thousands of miles. This program is one of the most completely developed activities in Lionism, and any guidance needed to assist clubs or Districts wishing to participate in it is immediately and easily available. Again, your support of these programs is yet one more way to build closer international cooperation and understanding between nations.

These, then, are the nine keys to thinking internationally. They will form the basic structure of my program as your International President during the next twelve months. Fellow Lions, each of us became a member of this Association because we found a very deep, a very personal satisfaction, in the work of Lionism. For in that work, we discover our own identities as human beings, as men, and as individuals, living and contending with the rules and regulations of organized society.

The time has come when we must recognize that we live in a world that grows smaller each day. We must, therefore, redefine our purpose as an organization. We are a force of more than one million men, dedicated to a very simple and very beautiful concept; helping people in need. Because of our size, our strength, our global involvement, we stand as a powerful and effective catalyst for increased understanding and cooperation between all people of the world. I ask that you join with me in a renewed effort to make Lions International an even greater moving force in bringing mankind closer together in compassion and love. We can do this. It is a very, very real possibility, because the basic structure of Lions International is one that easily overcomes the obstacles ordinarily met by differences in language and custom. We must recognize that as Lions working for all people around the world, it is our responsibility to fulfill a commitment to every member of the human race.

I ask you to think internationally. I ask you to join with me in recommitting ourselves to this basic, yet so dramatic idea; one million men serving mankind.

Before closing, my dear friends, may I pay tribute to some very, very special people, who are near and dear to me. They have been a tower of strength to me. They have shared the joys; they have shared the heartaches over the past many years. I do love them and thank them.

Your first lady Gil. (Applause)

My two sons and their lovely wives. (Applause)

Thank you my dear friends, one and all. You have been so very kind.

Thank you. (Applause)