



Speech by Mrs Zelma Lazarus, CEO, Impact India Foundation, at FICE World Congress (Humboldt University), BERLIN on 19th September, 2002.

Guten Tag, liebe Freunden,

1. I am truly delighted to be in your midst in this beautiful city of Berlin. We have received much from Germany and others in terms of voluntary support, donations of equipment, time, skills and funds - from hundreds of visitors to our Lifeline Express, thousands of Germans who came to our display at Expo 2000, millions of viewers of the films made by ARD, ZDF and other prominent European TV Channels, and many, many more who have read the articles in the German Press. Perhaps my presence here is significant because I can personally announce our gratitude to these persons, institutions, businessmen and professionals who have helped us on our way.

2. I am here to talk on a subject with which I am deeply involved: The Lifeline Express, the world's first hospital on a train. The Lifeline Express is an excellent example of, "Participation of young people in Social Development", or "Urban Youth in a Civil Society" - or whatever you want to call it, but what it really means is giving of yourself your time, your skills and resources for the betterment of those in need. It seems to me that at least three things are important to living a fulfilled life. First, become involved wherever your interests and talents lead you. Second, believe in yourselves, set your sights high, and remember that history has taught us that *one person really CAN make a difference*. And third, have some fun along the way. Rather than curse the inevitable bumps, twists and turns, relax and smile at the infinite delight and wonder along the way. Thank you again for inviting me here.

3. Let me tell you what happened at Stanford University a few months ago: students of Business Administration were asked to write their obituaries. Only four of the 130 students defined their lives in terms of business accomplishment; the rest described how they used their business skills to create social change from starting foundations to teaching and volunteering. This is far removed from the general impression that the individual of today is more demanding, with fewer ideals, no cause and a focus on "what's in there for me". The bottom line may be as tough as ever, but the class of today seems to be reaching fulfillment not in terms of material gains, but giving of themselves to support social programmes. With large amounts of corporate money and a high degree of professionalism entering the social sector, the social worker is slowly being replaced by a laptop wielding young professionals. Social work is no longer the domain of the retired senior citizen; it is a way of life and a career for the enlightened young as well.

4. And that is why Impact, a worldwide initiative against avoidable disablement has become so successful.



Promoted by the United Nations in association with the Governments of each participating country, Impact is probably one of the most ambitious programmes ever conceived, yet despite the vastness of its scope it HAS succeeded *mainly because it acts as a catalyst* which brings together the business houses, the citizens, the professionals and others to work in equal partnership with the Government in mass development programmes. It is not a new parallel programme, but it uses available delivery systems and existing infrastructure, together with the voluntary support of young people, supplementing, not substituting, existing services.

5. Our projects are dramatic and easily replicable and with the increasing involvement and cooperation of the corporate sector, we are beginning to use technologies that have for long been beyond our reach. Our best known is the Lifeline Express: the world's first hospital on a train - a unique collaboration with the Government, the corporate world and the community in taking a modern hospital to the people in remote areas. Our reach is across the vast Indian sub-continent with 600, 000 villages, using the entire Indian rail network - 70, 000 km. of rail track the largest in the world. Who would have ever thought that we could make it this far along the track?

6. The Lifeline Express has over the past ten years restored sight, movement, hearing and corrected clefts to over 300, 000 patients I repeat 300, 000 disabled children and adults in 55 projects using the donated services of 50, 000 surgeons and other medical personnel. It has covered almost all the states in the country, not to mention its six-month mission of mercy at the earthquake site in Gujarat last year, where it was the only hospital in the area; the others had all crumbled. Similarly, during the devastating earthquake in Latur some years ago, The Lifeline Express was on the spot just a few hours later. The Lifeline Express continues its mission not only in India, but now replicated in China. We also have a Lifeline Express in Central Africa and a riverboat in Bangladesh. This not only creates global awareness but Impact is sharing its skills and experience with other developing countries. In a very practical way I can say that it is the young people that come and join in to make an incredible impact.

7. So what better way than to tell it visually in a 30 minute film in German produced by German TV . You will see how thousands of people from all walks of life give of themselves for those in need. (Show film)

8. And along the way, there are hundreds of magic stories of the many people who have helped us reach new heights.

9. Andreas and Caroline Julich, a young couple from Germany, were so touched by the documentary on the Lifeline Express which they saw on ZDF TV, that they decided to “gift” us with a generous donation which and their friends pooled together on the eve of their wedding!

10. Alex Patrick Smith, a young traveller from Ireland happened to meet me on a domestic flight. I told him



about the Lifeline Express and he decided on the spot to spend a year long honeymoon with his bride, Dana, cycling around the world to raise money for our Hospital Train.

11. One of my most memorable chance encounters was with Dr. Patrick Rosario, a young, enthusiastic and bright doctor from New York. We met aboard an international flight, and in the midst of a casual conversation, Patrick spoke of his dream of bringing medical care to the poor tribals of Northern India. Fired by his spirit, Impact decided to join hands with him, and the Nirvana Project was born. Over the next several years, teams of American doctors came to the remote mountain villages of the Himalayas, bringing their expertise, heavy equipment, and caring to the tribals of this rugged region. But for the vision and daring of one young man, this project would possibly never have seen the light of day.

12. It was a remote village in Central India. In a winding queue some kilometers long a young tribal couple waited with their three small children to be screened, in the hope that they would be admitted on the train. All three young ones had been born blind. They were rejected, as there seemed little hope for them. However we did not give up. Their case histories were faxed to the World Health Organisation in Geneva and the prompt response informed us that a world-famous eye surgeon was passing through Delhi that very day en route to Japan. He came, he saw, he conquered. Today, all three children can see after the surgery. But that is not all a young roving journalist carried their story in a leading European magazine and today these three children of desperately poor parents have been funded for their upkeep and education by kind benefactors who read their story. You can now understand why the Lifeline Express is known as the Magic Train to those who, after years of suffering, find their mobility, vision, hearing restored or facial deformity corrected.

13. It is a cardinal principle in Impact that we need, not merely money, but also donations of time and skills. And in support of this effort, we have set up a Time Bank. Prospective volunteers have been asked to devote, keep aside or deposit a certain amount of their time, managerial talent, technical and commercial skills for the Lifeline Express either before the train arrives or while it is stationed there or even after it leaves to take care of the follow up. For example, a minimum of 40 surgeons and doctors donate their services daily on our train; in modest terms this equals USD 150, 000 worth of time and skills for each 45-day project. Impact depends entirely on these skills and other donated resources. And finally, it's about the fun and laughter that comes from knowing that it is not the stock price that matters at the end of the day, or how much you have climbed up the ladder or even whether you have the latest hand-held gadgets.

14. We were overwhelmed at the selection of the Lifeline Express for the prestigious United Nations Award for Excellence in Public Service worldwide. The honour belongs not only to Impact but also to the many, many committed young persons, individuals, members of professional agencies, government departments and corporations who have contributed to what has been done. We were excited to receive a Letter of Commendation from President Bill Clinton.



15. Our Lifeline Express, as successful as it may be, can only treat a miniscule number of the disabled as compared to those in need. Impact India has therefore conceived a new project, which we believe will have far reaching effects not only in India but throughout the developing world. Our Disability Reduction Project is intended to dramatically reduce by one-half the incidence of disabilities and also to reverse by one-half the existing disabilities over a three-year period in three separate States of India, each with a population of one million people i.e. three million in all.

16. In closing I would like to share with you some interesting figures: India remains critically divided into two worlds one in which literacy has stagnated for several years at 45% and infant mortality at 95 deaths per thousand (compared with 5 in the U.S.), and the other in which young men and women buy cars, wear designer clothes and are at the forefront of Information Technology. To reconcile these two worlds, and provide healthcare and education to the poor is a gigantic task that remains to be addressed. The hope of most of us Indians is that while eliminating the many unfortunate aspects of our public and social life, we can retain our family bonds, the respect of tradition and our basic value systems. Not only we who live in India, but the entire world has a stake in what is happening in our country today, where every 6th person in the world lives. Yet, with help from our well wishers, Impact is trying to show the way to bridging the gap between the two worlds not by seeking pity, but by demonstrating that self help and community participation truly works. The key element is the involvement of the young, lending their technical expertise and managerial talents catalysed by Impact to work in partnership with the Government in mass programmes for the prevention of disablement. The results show success more than we ever imagined...

17. I end with no greater wish for you than to hope that you live up to your best. And I add this poem, so appropriate in an era of limitless challenges and opportunities:

“To be alive in such an age, With every year a lightning page,
When miracles are everywhere, And every inch of common air
Throbs a tremendous prophesy, Of greater marvels yet to be.
O thrilling age. To be alive in such an age
To live in it, To give in it.”

TO GIVE IN IT

This is our message to you: Give your time and skills for those in need.



Impact India Foundation
Nhava House, 65 Maharshi Karve Road, Mumbai 400 002. India
P.O. Box Number 468, Mumbai GP.O., Mumbai 400 001. India
Tel. : (91-22) 233 9605 / 233 9606 / 233 9607
Fax: (91-22) 201 0594 / 233 9608
Email : impactindia@bol.net.in / zelma@bom3.vsnl.net.in
Web : www.impactfoundation.org

An International Initiative Against Avoidable Disablement

Promoted by the UNDP UNICEF & the WHO in association with the Government of India