

UPF Vladivostok, Russia welcomes bicyclist on last leg of around the world tour

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Vladivostok, Russia -- UPF joined with Rotary International to welcome a prominent bicyclist back to Russia on the last leg of a tour around the world.

An extraordinary meeting with UPF Ambassador for Peace Ildus Yanyshv -- a round-the-world bicycle traveler and just a happy man -- took place in Vladivostok's Hotel Hyundai on May 7, 2018.

In the framework of UPF's international Peace Road initiative, Mr. Yanyshv started out on his Global Bike Tour of Peace and Goodwill: Cycling to Serve on April 28, 2017 in his hometown of Kazan, the capital of the Russian Republic of Tatarstan. The project was sponsored by Rotary International and Universal Peace Federation.

Adhering to the Rotary International tradition, President Marina Yatsuk, director of Vladivostok's Palace of Culture of Railway Workers, struck a bell and gave the floor to the guest who had traveled around the world on a bicycle for over a year.

Mr. Yanyshv identified himself as a businessman, owner of a number of security enterprises in Kazan, chair of the Cyclists' Association of the Republic of Tatarstan, member of Rotary International in Kazan, Ambassador for Peace of the Universal Peace Federation, member of the European Federation of Cyclists, and trustee of Kazan Federal University.

In his presentation, Mr. Yanyshv recounted that in over one year he bicycled through 12 nations, covering 16,000 kilometers (about 9,942 miles). He did it in stages: from Kazan, Russia, to Lisbon, Portugal; across Britain, from Southampton to Liverpool; from New York to Miami, Florida, and on to San Diego, California. After completing the Chinese stage, he arrived in Vladivostok in the Far East of Russia on May 5.

The next stage of his bike tour Mr. Yanyshv will realize together with Alexei Kostyuchenko, a bicyclist with disabilities who is traveling on a special hand-operated bicycle from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok. Meanwhile, Mr. Yanyshv will cycle from Vladivostok to Kazan.

Mr. Yanyshv explained: "Alexei Kostyuchenko lived for several years in a boarding school for disabled people, 'waiting for his death,' as he himself said. Thanks to support from Rotary International, he bought himself a hand-bike, and from a disabled person with disabilities he turned into a man with unlimited moral and physical capabilities! Traveling across Russia, he does it for his own pleasure and by this makes others happy!"

"I believe that his and my mission of involving people in cycling has seriously expanded. I realized that traveling by bike is available, and through this I have practically realized my dream to travel around the world with a bicycle. Among us, we divided the earth in two halves."

Mr. Yanyshv continued: "For me, a bicycle means, of course, a journey. And also it's creativity! I collect bicycles. I have a large library of technical, scientific and philosophical literature related to bicycles. In many countries I buy research materials related to the bicycle, on various aspects. I visit bicycle museums; for example, in China there is a very good museum of 500 bicycles.

"No doubt, a bicycle has the function of promoting friendship. There are a lot of cities around the world with a variety of bicycle associations and clubs; they unite people."

One of the main results of our Peace Road project was collecting information about bicycles that can be used not only for sports, travel and business, but also in social projects and charity. So, for those of us attending the meeting, the bicycle also became a means of communication, movement and creation.

A great deal of attention was drawn to the economic benefits of using a bicycle in the city. In addition to service, tourism, cargo delivery, bicycle food trade, film production, and many other bicycle applications, Mr. Yanyshv gave examples of the People's Republic of China developing bike-sharing systems, either for free or for a very small fee. Such systems can significantly improve the environmental situation. In many Chinese cities, noise, traffic jams, harmful emissions into the atmosphere will soon be things of the past.

"Returning to the topic of service, the bicycle is a generator of happiness," Mr. Yanyshv said. "Any project involving the use of a bicycle can be both economically and socially beneficial."

He gave examples of recycling used bicycles in various nations. In France, Rotary International supports the repair of thousands of used bicycles, which then are transported to Africa. In the United Kingdom, former prisoners are trained to repair bicycles, thus benefiting society. In his own hometown of Kazan, there is a training program to help people who cannot repair their bicycles by themselves.

"After all, it is a great happiness to straighten out, clean, fix, and assemble your own bike!" Mr. Yanyshv said. "And, of course, a bicycle is an opportunity for people with physical limitations. Alexei Kostyuchenko is a good example. There are many such people. They dream of going out of their apartment, sitting in a stroller with a manual or electric drive, taking a walk or shopping. We could, for example, from two bicycles make one with a stroller and give such people a chance to be in demand in society."

Mr. Yanyshv mentioned that bicycles give riders the chance to see things they would never notice from the window of a car or a bus. In addition, he said, it's easier to meet and socialize with people when we are on a bicycle, leading us to notice more goodness and peace around us. Therefore, he said, if you want happiness -- buy a bicycle, and it will become for you a generator of happiness!

At the end of the meeting, according to tradition, the host, Rotary Club of Vladivostok, and the guest, Rotary Club of Kazan, exchanged pennants. Mr. Yanyshv had brought his pennant with him throughout the 16,000 kilometers of his trip. He also handed to the president a small flag with the slogan of his tour "Global Bike Tour for Peace and Goodwill: Cycling to Serve," to be given to the first Rotary Club cyclist of Vladivostok.

Attendees included Natalia Chernenko, secretary of Rotary International in the city of Nakhodka; Alexander Khodorenko, a first-year student of Far East University, Faculty of International Security; Irina Mikhailova, a financier and consultant to an NGO; Elena Nekhayenko, a member of the management board of a financial institution; Arthur Aliyev, a businessman who helps to start businesses in China; Semyon and Maria Sergienko, representatives of the Universal Peace Federation; and enthusiastic cyclist Eugene Kondakov, a teacher of geography and participant in the Warmshowers network which extends hospitality to bicycle travelers.

Members of the Rotary Club of Vladivostok attending the meeting included Natalia Prisekina, a professor at Far Eastern Federal University and a senior partner at the international law firm Russin and Vecchi; and Alexander Samohvalov and Margarita Samohvalova, who welcomed Mr. Yanyshv home after a long journey. As Margarita Samohvalova said, they understood each other absolutely, as if they were old friends!

A very warm ending to the meeting came in the form of the song The Impossible Dream, sung by Maria Sergienko of UPF.

After the meeting, the question arose, whether Vladivostok could raise the level of cycling culture among its citizens. Many people expressed the opinion that Vladivostok had a difficult terrain for bicycling, but Mr. Yanyshv disagreed and voiced his conviction: "Unless children or adults learn to eliminate the elementary malfunctions on their bicycle, they will be afraid to ride. Therefore, cycling skill inspires a person with the desire to own a bicycle, use it and be happy!"

Our special thanks to Yevgeny Kondakov for the photos!

For all the participants, this meeting marked a first step in looking at life differently, from the point of view of a cyclist.