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NEWS RELEASE

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Global health community commits over \$630 million in aggressive push for polio eradication

Rotary International, Gates Foundation, United Kingdom, and Germany pledge critically needed funds and urge donor and endemic country governments to help end crippling childhood disease

SAN DIEGO, Calif., U.S.A. (Jan. 21, 2009) -- Rotary International, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the British and German governments today committed more than \$630 million in new funds to fight polio, a crippling and sometimes fatal disease that still paralyzes children in parts of Africa and Asia and threatens children everywhere. In addition to pledging needed funds, leaders urged additional donors and leaders of countries where polio still exists to join them in aggressive push for eradication.

The Gates Foundation is awarding a \$255 million challenge grant to Rotary, which Rotary will match with \$100 million raised by its members over the next three years. At the same time, the United Kingdom is giving an additional \$150 million (£100 million) and Germany is giving an additional \$130 million (€100 million), both to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). Contributions from the U.K. and Germany over the next five years will not count toward Rotary's match of the Gates Foundation challenge grant.

As a spearheading partner in the initiative, Rotary's chief role is fundraising, advocacy and mobilizing volunteers. The announcements came during the Rotary International Assembly, the humanitarian service organization's annual leadership conference.

"Rotarians, government leaders and health professionals have made a phenomenal commitment so polio afflicts only a small number of the world's children," said Bill Gates, co-chair of the Gates Foundation. "However, complete elimination of the polio virus is difficult and will continue to be difficult for a number of years. Rotary in particular has inspired my own personal commitment to get deeply involved in achieving eradication."

In accepting the Gates challenge, Rotary Foundation Chair Jonathan Majiyagbe said the funding partnership will inspire other polio eradication allies, both current and new, to ramp up their support.

"With the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we are on the brink of eradicating one of the most feared diseases in the world," Majiyagbe said. "This shared commitment of Rotary and the Gates Foundation should encourage governments and nongovernmental organizations to ensure that resources and the will of the world are available to end polio once and for all."

UK International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander said, "This £100 million pledge by the UK Government, combined with the money from our other partners, is a massive boost in the battle to rid the world of the scourge of polio. We have already significantly increased the number of vaccinations for those people most at risk, and there has been real progress in reducing the number of new infections. Now is the time to make the final push to eradicate polio. This investment will ensure future generations in the developing world will no longer have their lives blighted by this crippling disease."

New funding and government support still required

The polio eradication initiative faces an ongoing funding shortfall that must be closed if eradication is to be achieved. With these new investments, along with contributions received from Canada, Russia, the United States and other donors, the shortfall for 2009-10 is \$340 million. The new funding from Germany will further reduce the gap.

"G-8 countries pledged repeatedly to take all necessary steps to eradicate polio," said Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development. "Germany has contributed significantly to living up to this commitment. We urge other countries to join us in closing the funding gap and ensuring that health workers have the support they need to protect the world's children from polio."

Polio has been completely eliminated in the Americas, the Western Pacific and Europe, but the wild polio virus persists in Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan, and imported cases from these countries threaten other developing nations. It is in these four countries that the most serious challenges exist, including vaccine effectiveness (India), low vaccination coverage rates (Nigeria), and access problems due to conflict (Afghanistan and Pakistan). Much depends on the countries themselves. Recent progress in key areas has shown that these challenges can be overcome with sufficient national and sub-national commitment.

Launched in 1988, the GPEI -- spearheaded by Rotary, the World Health Organization, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF -- has reduced the number of polio cases by 99 percent over the past two decades, from more than 350,000 cases in 1988 to an estimated 1,600 in 2008.

The GPEI partners will use the new polio eradication funds to support a range of activities, including:

- National Immunization Days, when countries aim to immunize every child under five years old with oral polio vaccine
- Supplemental immunization activities focused on providing extra vaccinations to children in high-risk areas
- Research into new vaccines and ways to ensure they are available to vulnerable children
- Surveillance activities to detect cases of polio so that progress can be measured and outbreaks contained.

WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan said: "Together with enhanced commitment by the last four endemic countries at all levels, the new funding commitments are precisely what is needed to help the governments in these countries overcome the remaining barriers to reaching every child with polio vaccine."

"Successfully eradicating polio is crucially important, not just to ensure that no child will ever again be paralyzed by this devastating disease, but also to show that today -- in the 21st Century -- we can deliver life-saving health interventions to every single child, no matter where they live, and even in the most

difficult and challenging environments,” said Dr. Chan, who in 2008 made polio eradication WHO’s top operational priority.

This is the second challenge grant for polio eradication the Gates Foundation has given Rotary. The first came in November 2007, when Rotary agreed to match a \$100 million grant dollar-for-dollar.

Rotary clubs worldwide already are hard at work raising the matching funds for what the organization has named Rotary’s \$200 Million Challenge. Since the first Gates Foundation challenge grant was announced, Rotary clubs have raised more than \$60 million toward the goal. Their enthusiastic commitment was a major reason the second challenge was made and accepted. Rotary also invites the general public to participate by visiting **rotary.org/endpolio** to learn about polio eradication and contribute to Rotary’s \$200 Million Challenge.

For video and still photos go to: www.thenewsmarket.com/rotaryinternational