



ROTARY

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NEWS RELEASE

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Rotary marks progress in drive to eradicate polio *Despite economic challenges, donations exceed expectations*

BIRMINGHAM, England (23 June 2009) – In the final push to rid the world of a crippling and potentially fatal disease, Rotary International today announced that it has raised US\$90.7 million toward its US\$200 Million Challenge, a fundraising effort supporting crucial polio eradication activities.

Rotary Foundation Trustee Chair Jonathan Majiyagbe announced the new figure to an international audience of 18,000 Rotary members at the organization's annual convention in Birmingham. Also present was actress Mia Farrow, a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and polio survivor.

"I am extremely grateful and proud to be a part of such an impressive alliance," said Farrow. "I perhaps am more motivated than most people because I had polio myself when I was nine, and it was a real struggle to come through it. And what I saw around me will never leave me, in the hospitals and public wards for contagious diseases. I also have a son who's paralyzed from the waist down because of polio. This is a terrible disease and I would love to see the day when no more children have it."

The convention began on 21 June, when United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon praised Rotary for its leadership role in the fight against polio and received the Polio Eradication Champion award, the highest recognition Rotary bestows to heads of state, health agency ministers and directors, and other leaders for their significant contributions to the eradication effort.

The funds announced today will be used to match a US\$350 million challenge grant recently awarded to Rotary by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – a funding agreement that will provide US\$555 million to the global health initiative within the next three years.

In late 2007, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation originally challenged Rotary members to match a US\$100 million grant, dollar-for-dollar. Yet due to Rotary's extraordinary progress despite a faltering global economy, Bill Gates announced an additional challenge in January 2009.

Since 1985, when polio paralyzed more than 350,000 children in 125 countries every year, ending polio has been Rotary's top philanthropic goal. Since then, polio cases have been slashed by 99 percent worldwide, with fewer than 2,000 in 2008, and just four countries remain polio-endemic: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

"While most of the world is polio-free, this vaccine-preventable disease still threatens children in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East," said Majiyagbe. "And because polio is a virus that moves from child-to-

child, it is capable of re-emerging anywhere in the world if we let down our guard. Rotary is committed to eradicating this disease once and for all.”

Polio eradication – which hinges on vaccinating all children under the age of five years – is seen as a model for reaching families worldwide with the necessities needed to improve lives.

“The progress made in some of the most challenging areas of the world proves that with enough commitment and support, we can end polio worldwide,” said Rotary International President Dong-Kurn Lee.

As the volunteer arm and top private sector contributor to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative - a public private partnership spearheaded by the World Health Organization, Rotary International, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF - Rotary has contributed more than US\$800 million and countless volunteer hours to the protection of more than two billion children in 122 countries.

Yet the Initiative currently faces a funding gap for 2009-2010 of US\$345 million. “We hope that the commitment from the private sector will challenge other donors to step up and make sure we have the resources needed to eradicate polio,” added Lee.

Rotary is a global network of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian service and help to build goodwill and peace in the world. There are more than 1.2 million Rotary members in over 33,000 clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical regions.