

## **Rotary, Gates Foundation announce \$355 million for polio eradication**

*New challenge grant helps bridge critical funding gap, inspire other donors in global effort to end crippling childhood disease*

**SAN DIEGO, Calif., U.S.A. (Jan. 21, 2009)** -- Rotary International and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have announced they will contribute a combined \$355 million in new funds for polio eradication.

The Gates Foundation is awarding Rotary a \$255 million challenge grant, which Rotary will match with \$100 million raised by its members and supporters over the next three years. As a spearheading partner in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), Rotary's chief role is fundraising, advocacy and mobilizing volunteers. The announcement 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 to get us to a point at which 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 are available to end polio once and for all."

"This partnership of Rotary and the Gates Foundation offers a historic opportunity to rid the world of a disease that robs children of their futures," said RI President Dong Kurn Lee. "It is a significant boost toward making real our dream of a polio-free world."

Rotary will spend the grant money in direct support of immunization activities carried out by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which is spearheaded by Rotary and its partners, the World Health Organization, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and UNICEF. Rotary will distribute the funds through grants to WHO and UNICEF.

Polio eradication has been Rotary's top priority since 1985, and since then Rotary clubs have raised nearly \$800 million for the effort. Although the initiative has slashed the number of polio cases by 99 percent, the wild poliovirus still persists in four countries: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan, and imported cases from those nations threaten to reinfect countries where the virus has been stopped. The initiative currently faces a critical funding shortfall that must be closed if eradication is to be achieved.

This is the second challenge grant Rotary has received from the Gates Foundation for polio eradication. In November 2007, Rotary accepted a \$100 million challenge grant, which Rotary is matching dollar-for-dollar. The two challenge grants represent a combined total of \$555 million in polio eradication funds. Rotary's three-year effort to raise the matching funds for both grants is called Rotary's \$200 Million Challenge. Rotary invites the general public to participate by visiting [rotary.org/endpolio](http://rotary.org/endpolio) to learn about polio eradication and contribute to the challenge match.

Rotary is an international humanitarian service organization with more than 33,000 clubs in about 200 countries and geographical areas. Rotary's 1.2 million members are men and women who are business, professional and community leaders united by a commitment to make the world a better place through volunteer service.