

**Press Release**

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**Global Luminaries Unite to Issue Urgent Call for a Polio-Free World**

*New and Existing Donors Underscore Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity to End Polio Forever*

UNITED NATIONS, 27 September 2012 – In a display of solidarity, leaders from around the world today vowed to capitalize on progress achieved this year and to step up the fight to eradicate polio. Heads of state from Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan stood alongside donor government officials and new donors from the public and private sector to outline what is needed to stamp out this disease forever: long-term commitment of resources, applying innovative best practices, and continued leadership and accountability at all levels of government in the endemic countries.

“This decisive moment is a matter of health and justice. Every child should have the right to start life with equal protection from this disease. That’s why I have made eradicating polio a top priority for my second term as Secretary-General,” said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Polio is a vaccine-preventable disease that is more than 99 percent eliminated from the world. Today, there are the fewest number of polio cases in the fewest districts in the fewest countries than at any time in history. In 1988, when the global fight against polio began, there were 125 countries where polio raged. Today, there are only three: Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan. India, long-regarded as the nation facing the greatest challenges to eradication, has been polio-free for more than 18 months.

“The evidence is clear: if we all do our part, we can and will end this disease. But we must act quickly and give ourselves the very best chance to succeed,” said Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, one of the leading donors to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). “When we defeat polio, it will motivate us to aim for other great health and development milestones.”

Earlier this year, at the World Health Assembly, 194 member states declared the completion of polio eradication to be a “programmatically emergency for global public health.” In order to look beyond short-term challenges, however, GPEI is developing a long-term roadmap for ending polio. The strategy also will ensure that the legacy of investments in polio supports other vaccine-preventable disease goals.

“Failure to eradicate polio is unforgivable, forever. Failure is not an option. No single one of us can bring this long, hard drive over the last hurdle. But together we can,” said Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization.

Ending polio is an important early milestone in the Decade of Vaccines, a global vision and commitment to reach all children with the vaccines they need. A polio-free world also will lay the foundation for a better public health system that provides critical health services for children in the poorest and most inaccessible places.

“Together we can make history by eradicating polio – thanks mostly to the heroes in the field who risk their lives, every day, to deliver vaccines to children in some of the most dangerous parts of the world,” said Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director.

The high-level event, “Our Commitment to the Next Generation: The Legacy of a Polio-free World,” featured opening remarks from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and was moderated by Senator Timothy E. Wirth, president of the UN Foundation.

Speakers included leaders of the three polio-endemic countries: President Hamid Karzai, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; President Goodluck Jonathan, Federal Republic of Nigeria; and President Asif Ali Zardari, Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Earlier this year, these leaders launched national emergency plans to stop transmission of polio in their countries.

“Governments need to step up and honor their commitments to polio eradication if we are to achieve a polio-free world,” said Wilfrid J. Wilkinson, Chair of Rotary Foundation Trustees. “We must seize the advantage by acting immediately, or risk breaking our pledge to the world’s children.” Rotary International, which already has contributed US\$1.2 billion to polio eradication, announced additional funding of \$75 million over three years to GPEI.

Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard reinforced Australia’s commitment and called on the Commonwealth to do its part. Last October, Australia committed \$50M during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Also speaking was Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services for the United States. The United States has been the leading donor to the GPEI and provides technical support through the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).

“We have been given the unique opportunity to end polio and provide a lasting legacy for the world’s children,” said Dr. Thomas Frieden, Director of the CDC. “Together we must strive to achieve this important global milestone.”

The Islamic Development Bank, a new donor to the polio eradication effort, announced a three-year \$227 million financing package to Pakistan which will cover the majority of the country’s polio vaccination campaign costs. It also announced a \$3 million grant for polio eradication activities in Afghanistan.

Additional leaders pledged new and continued commitment to polio eradication. These included:

- H.E. Julian Fantino, Minister, International Cooperation, Canada, who announced an initiative to engage civil society to match funds to GPEI;
- H.E. Koichiro Gemba, Minister, Foreign Affairs, Japan;
- Rt. Hon. Alan Duncan, Minister of State, International Development, United Kingdom, whose government committed an additional £25M to polio eradication in 2012;
- Mr. Sandro Rosell, President, Football Club Barcelona (FCB) and FCB Foundation, who announced the club’s engagement on the polio issue in collaboration with the Gates Foundation and Etisalat, the largest telecomm operator in the Middle East;
- Ms. Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, Pakistan’s Goodwill Ambassador on Polio Eradication.

On 29 September, the Global Poverty Project, a campaign group aimed at ending extreme poverty, will host the Global Citizen Festival, a concert bringing together more than 60,000 people in New York’s Central Park with the aim of inspiring a global movement to voice support for eradicating polio and ending extreme poverty.

**Notes for editors:**

The UN High Level event will be live-streamed, 12:30-1:30 p.m. EDT, on <http://webtv.un.org/>.

Photos and video of the event will be available at [www.rotary.org/mediacenter](http://www.rotary.org/mediacenter) and

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/press-room/Pages/news-market.aspx>.

**About GPEI**

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), launched in 1988, is spearheaded by national governments, the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UNICEF, and supported by key partners including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Since its launch, the incidence of polio has been reduced by more than 99 percent. In 1988, more than 350,000 children were paralyzed each year in more than 125 endemic countries. In 2012, 145 new cases have been reported, and only three countries remain endemic: Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

[www.polioeradication.org](http://www.polioeradication.org)

Country fact sheets: Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan

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**For more information:**

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## ADDITIONAL SPEAKER REMARKS

"We are developing a new mode of financing with the Gates Foundation that will become a landmark in our commitment to fight global diseases such as polio. It is a major innovation, and a new model of partnership with non-traditional donors." -**Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali Al-Madani, President, Islamic Development Bank**

"The world is at a critical junction in the fight against polio, and Canada remains committed to eradicating this debilitating disease." -**Julian Fantino, Minister of International Cooperation, Canada**

"The Nigerian effort to eradicate polio has taken a long and winding road; it is my firm belief that we have finally arrived at the straight and inevitable path toward eradicating polio. We look forward to a day in the not too distant future when I shall stand here with you and together, celebrate our conquest of this dreadful disease." -**President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria**

"Eradicating polio is ultimately about well-planned and high-quality operations that overcome managerial, societal and political obstacles. We know that global polio eradication depends on us. We are not done yet, but we are confident that with your support, we can deliver a polio-free Afghanistan, and help bring about a polio-free world." -**President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan**

"We can and will wipe out polio once and for all. Japan remains committed to actively contributing toward the achievement of a polio-free world." -**Koichiro Gemba, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Japan**

"By combining FC Barcelona's reach and fans around the world with Etisalat's resources in Nigeria and the Gates Foundation's partnerships and global voice, we can mobilize support and resources we never before imagined, and together, we will help end polio forever." -**Sandro Rosell, President, FC Barcelona and FC Barcelona Foundation**

"A goal as big as eradicating polio from the planet can't be achieved by just one country, one person, or one organization. The world needs current donors to remain engaged, new partners to bring resources and enthusiasm, and continued leadership from countries who still face the threat of polio and others who have successfully fought this disease." -**Senator Timothy E. Wirth, President, United Nations Foundation**

"Fighting polio is a national priority. Our aim is to completely eradicate polio from Pakistan." -**Ms. Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, Pakistan's Goodwill Ambassador on Polio Eradication**

"As we all lap the last mile in the global community's epic struggle against the Polio Virus, I would like to say that no Government in Pakistan has had a resolve more firm than ours in ridding the country and the world of this scourge." -**President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan**