



# ROTARY

## NEWS RELEASE

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### Rotary to commit \$75 million to end polio

*Funding announcement to come during special UN General Assembly session to rally support for global eradication of crippling childhood disease*

**EVANSTON, Ill. (Sept. 27, 2012)** — Rotary International plans to contribute US \$75 million over three years to the [Global Polio Eradication Initiative](#) as part of a worldwide effort to close a \$945 million funding gap that threatens to derail the 24 year-old global health effort, even as new polio cases are at an all-time low.

Rotary, which already has contributed \$1.2 billion to stop this crippling childhood disease, will announce its new funding commitment in New York City on Sept. 27 during a special side-event on polio eradication convened by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly.

Secretary-General Ban, who has made polio eradication a top priority of his second term, is expected to issue a strong call urging UN member states to ramp up their support for the polio eradication initiative, launched in 1988 by Rotary, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The partnership now includes the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the United Nations Foundation.

The New York event will include two panel sessions which will include remarks by Wilf Wilkinson, chair of The Rotary Foundation; Bill Gates, co-chair of the Gates Foundation; and top leaders and heads of state from the remaining polio-endemic countries and key donor countries. The wild poliovirus is now endemic only to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria, although other countries remain at risk for re-established cases imported from the endemics.

“It is imperative that governments step up and honor their commitments to polio eradication if we are to achieve our goal of a polio-free world,” said Wilkinson. “We are at a true tipping point, with success never closer than it is right now. We must seize the advantage by acting immediately, or risk breaking our pledge to the world’s children.”

The urgency at the UN follows action taken in May by the World Health Assembly, which declared polio eradication to be a “programmatic emergency for global public health.” Although new polio cases are at an all-time low – fewer than 140 worldwide so far this year – the \$945 million shortfall has already affected several scheduled immunization activities in polio-affected countries and could derail the entire program unless the gap is bridged. If eradication fails and polio rebounds, up to 200,000 children a year could be paralyzed.

Polio cases have plummeted by more than 99 percent since 1988, when the disease infected about 350,000 children a year. Fewer than 700 new cases were reported in 2011. Rotary and its partners have reached more than 2.5 billion children with the oral polio vaccine, preventing more than five million cases of paralysis and hundreds of thousands of pediatric deaths.

Rotary's chief responsibilities in the initiative are fundraising and advocacy, a role of increasing importance as the end game draws near. In early September, Rotary launched a new, interactive website -- [endpolionow.org](http://endpolionow.org) -- intended to educate, activate and inspire visitors to actively support the polio eradication effort. Visitors are encouraged to sign a petition calling for world leaders to commit additional resources to close the funding gap. The e-signatures will be presented to Secretary-General Ban in New York. Site visitors can also estimate the potential dollar value they can generate by sharing the polio eradication message through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Earlier this year, Rotary raised \$228 million in new money for polio eradication in response to a \$355 million challenge grant from the Gates Foundation, which promptly contributed an additional \$50 million in recognition of Rotary's commitment.

[Rotary](#) is a global humanitarian organization with more than 1.2 million members in 34,000 Rotary clubs in over 200 countries and geographical areas. Rotary members are men and women who are business, professional and community leaders with a shared commitment to make the world a better place through humanitarian service. To access broadcast quality video footage and still images of Rotary members immunizing children against polio available go to: [Media Center](#).