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NEWS RELEASE

Rotary International and Gates Foundation together commit \$200 million to eradicate polio

EVANSTON, Ill., U.S.A. (Nov. 26, 2007) -- Rotary International today announced a partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that will inject a much-needed US\$200 million into the global campaign to eradicate polio, a crippling and sometimes fatal disease that still paralyzes children in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East and threatens children everywhere.

The Rotary Foundation has received a \$100-million Gates Foundation grant, which Rotary will raise funds to match, dollar-for-dollar, over three years. The Evanston-based volunteer service organization will spend the initial \$100 million within one year in direct support of immunization activities carried out by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), a partnership spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF.

"The extraordinary dedication of Rotary members has played a critical role in bringing polio to the brink of eradication," says Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "Eradicating polio will be one of the most significant public health accomplishments in history, and we are committed to helping reach that goal."

The polio eradication grant is one of the largest challenge grants ever given by the Gates Foundation and the largest grant received by Rotary in its 102-year history. Polio eradication has been Rotary's top priority since 1985. Since then, Rotary has contributed \$633 million to the eradication effort.

"Rotary members worldwide have worked very hard over the years to reach this point, and it is rewarding to see our approach validated in such a significant way by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation," says Dr. Robert Scott, who leads Rotary's polio eradication effort and chairs The Rotary Foundation, the not-for-profit charitable arm of Rotary that will administer the grant. "We hope that this shared commitment of Rotary and the Gates Foundation will challenge other donors – including foundations, governments and non-governmental organizations – to step up and make sure we have the resources needed to rid the world of polio once and for all."

The Gates Foundation grant comes at a crucial juncture for the initiative, which urgently needs an infusion of funds to reach the eradication goal. Although the GPEI has succeeded in slashing the number of polio cases by 99 percent over the past two decades, the wild poliovirus still persists in four countries: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. The polio cases represented by that final one percent are the most costly to prevent due to such factors as geographical isolation, worker fatigue, low coverage with the vaccine, armed conflict and cultural barriers.

Last month, WHO released data confirming that all four remaining polio-endemic countries are on track to achieve eradication. In particular, significant progress has been made in India and Nigeria, which together account for 85 percent of the world's polio cases. Nigeria has reported 226 cases so far this year, compared with 958 at the same time last year. In both countries, more effective oral polio vaccines have contributed to steady progress in reducing polio cases.

WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan says the Gates Foundation grant reaffirms that polio eradication is both feasible and achievable. "This investment is precisely the catalyst we need as we intensify the push to finish polio," said Chan. "We have the technical tools to do it, and we can achieve a polio-free world if the rest of our financial partners step up to meet the challenge."

Most of the initial \$100 million will be spent in support of mass immunization campaigns in polio-affected countries, poliovirus surveillance activities and community education and outreach. The grant will also support an expanded research agenda on ways to halt the spread of the poliovirus. Rotary will distribute the funds through grants to WHO and UNICEF.

"The funds made possible through the Gates Foundation grant will help the Global Polio Eradication Initiative scale up its efforts to provide oral polio vaccine to children in those isolated locations where it's most needed," says UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. "This important contribution will improve the capacity to protect vulnerable children from this debilitating disease."

CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding says the collaboration between Rotary and the Gates Foundation underscores the importance of private sector involvement in major public health efforts. "As a government agency, we think it's wonderful that our private-sector colleagues have taken a leadership role in something as important as polio eradication. Their participation is absolutely critical."

Founded in Chicago in 1905, Rotary is a worldwide organization of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian service and help to build goodwill and peace in the world. Rotary's global membership is approximately 1.2 million men and women who belong to more than 32,000 Rotary clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas.

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