

RIBI Press Release on Statement by Gordon Brown

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RIBI welcomes government funding for Global Vaccines Alliance

Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland welcomes the announcement today by the Chancellor Rt Hon Gordon Brown that the UK will provide \$130 million a year for the new Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunisation, to help vaccinate millions of children against diseases such as polio, hepatitis B and tetanus in the world's poorest countries.

Rotary has to date raised \$600 million for vaccines, operational support and activities relating to immunization for the polio eradication programme. Rotary is a spearheading partner in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which also includes the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Mike Webb President of Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland said "Great progress has been made. Just over 1,000 cases were reported in 2004, compared to 350,000 in 1988- a 99 percent reduction. We must all continue the fight for a polio-free world."

African nations have fought hard against this epidemic; launching massive synchronized immunization drives reaching over 100 million children. Polio-free countries recording polio importations this year are holding emergency immunization campaigns to stop the virus becoming re-established.

Thanks to these efforts, the end of polio looks close. But the goal is threatened by a major funding shortfall. This initiative urgently needs US\$200 million for activities in 2006, of which US\$75 million is needed by November 2005, for activities in the first quarter of 2006.

Webb continues "Building on the recent US\$110 million commitment from the UK for polio eradication, we are delighted that the government is continuing to help to focus attention on these needs, and Rotary urges other world leaders to do likewise. "

Rotary is the leading private-sector contributor second only to the United States Government. Since 1985, when Rotary launched its PolioPlus program, individual Rotary members have collectively raised US\$600 million and contributed countless volunteer hours to help immunize more than 2 billion children in 122 countries.

"In the effort to eradicate polio, Rotary International has spurred a model private-public partnership. The combined strengths of civil society, the private sector, governments and international agencies, have made enormous progress in what seemed an impossible task," Dr. LEE Jong-wook, Director General of WHO, told Rotarians gathered for their centenary celebrations in Chicago, Illinois in June.

"Rotarians continue to be the heart and soul of the polio eradication effort," said Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF. "In addition to their own record-breaking financial contribution for polio eradication and countless volunteer hours, Rotarians have helped leverage a further US \$1.7 billion from governments for the cause."

Rotary International is the world's first volunteer service organization with 1.2 million members in 168 countries. To date, over one million Rotary members have volunteered their time and personal resources to help immunize more than two billion children in 122 countries against polio. By the time the world is certified polio-free, Rotary's contributions to the global polio eradication effort will exceed US\$600 million.

In addition to raising and contributing funds, Rotary has provided an army of volunteers to promote and assist during national immunization campaigns. Rotary members assist with vaccine delivery, social mobilization, and administration of the oral polio vaccine to children.

More information on polio eradication can be found at www.polioeradication.org.