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GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION WITHIN OUR REACH: *The U.S. Role*

Polio is an insidious, incurable disease that kills and cripples children. For thousands of years, polio had been endemic until the mid-twentieth century when the development of vaccines against polio by Drs. Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin offered the first hope for prevention and control. At the outset of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) in 1988, polio was endemic in more than 125 countries on five continents, and paralyzed approximately 1,000 children every day. The GPEI is a unique public-private partnership led by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF, and Rotary International, and represents a coordinated, global effort to eradicate polio everywhere.

The world has made remarkable progress toward polio eradication. Since 1988, two billion children around the globe have been immunized against polio. The annual number of polio cases has dropped by over 99 percent, from 350,000 cases per year to fewer than 2,000 per year. The Americas, Europe, and the Western Pacific have been certified as polio-free. Only four countries in Africa and Asia are still polio-endemic — Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Nigeria. We have never been closer to the goal of eradicating polio.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

Difficult challenges remain. Polio transmission has intensified in key countries in 2006. In addition, there are critical funding gaps for the global polio efforts this year and beyond.

The populations still affected by polio in the remaining endemic countries are among the poorest and most difficult to reach with tools of public health, such as vaccines, communication campaigns, or trained health workers. In many cases, conflict, grim poverty, and religious-social tension trouble the affected areas. Setbacks in these areas have resulted in the exportation of the illness to countries that had previously eradicated polio, creating new challenges for countries and for the global program.

Eliminating polio will require commitment, cooperation, and community engagement that extend beyond the efforts of public health workers. Overcoming the remaining challenges requires diplomatic efforts at the highest levels of Government along with public-health action on the ground.

THE U.S. INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

The strategies and tools to eradicate polio are well developed and effective:

- Build on partnerships with agencies such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Rotary International, and the Child Survival Collaborations and Resources (CORE) Group.
- Strengthen and improve health systems in affected countries.
- Support polio immunization campaigns, outbreak responses, and supplemental immunizations.
- Develop integrated disease-surveillance approaches and establish networks for laboratory support.
- Coordinate polio-eradication activities with other public health campaigns, such as measles and HIV-prevention.
- Reach out diplomatically to financial donors and to affected countries to maintain commitment and cooperation.

U.S. ASSISTANCE FOR GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION

- The U.S. Government has contributed nearly 28 percent of the total \$5 billion donated to GPEI thus far, including \$132 million in 2006.
- The U.S. Government funds help to improve health systems: purchase vaccine; detect and investigate the suspected cases of polio; map communities and plan vaccination campaigns; train and supervise surveillance officers, vaccinators, and laboratory personnel; provide and maintain equipment to transport and store vaccine; and develop and maintain critical accredited laboratories.
- The U.S. Government funds approximately 500 million doses of oral polio vaccine annually, purchased through UNICEF.
- The United States supports National Immunization Days in priority countries with funding and cutting-edge technical expertise.
- The U.S. Government links U.S.-based private voluntary organizations with community-based organizations to develop and deliver communications in local languages to increase the acceptance of vaccinations in hard-to-reach communities and to conduct polio-immunizations campaigns in the poorest and most challenging areas.