

# ROTARY CHALLENGES WORLD'S GOVERNMENTS TO TARGET POLIO

Ahead of the UN General Assembly, Evanston-based humanitarian group holds strategy session with members from around the world including Pakistan and Nigeria

EVANSTON, Ill. (Aug. 2012) — Rotary International aims to send a clear message to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly convening in September in New York: The world's governments must act swiftly and decisively if the crippling childhood disease polio is to finally be eradicated.

To that end, about 50 Rotary leaders from a dozen countries met Aug. 21-22 at the humanitarian group's world headquarters in Evanston, Ill., to devise strategies on how to persuade the international community to ante up the resources required to beat polio once and for all. Polio eradication has been Rotary's top priority since the 1980s. It is a devastating disease which has no cure and can only be prevented. Once rampant in the United States, it has disappeared from the US. Though not seen in the US now, it is barely a plane ride away should the disease continue in other countries.

The group included Rotary leaders from Pakistan and Nigeria, two of the three countries where polio remains endemic (the third is Afghanistan). Participants will return to their homelands armed with the tools they need to advocate on behalf of polio eradication at all levels of government and society.

The focus then shifts to New York, where Rotary leaders will attend a UN General Assembly breakout session on Sept. 27, where UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is expected to issue a strong call-to-action urging UN member states to ramp up their support for polio eradication. Rotary will join a group of national leaders and other donors, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in what is expected to be a round of announcements on commitments.

The urgency at the UN stems from 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 120 worldwide so far this year – the eradication initiative faces a funding shortfall of nearly \$1 billion that could derail the entire program. If eradication fails and polio rebounds, up to 250,000 children a year could be paralyzed.

Polio cases have plummeted by more than 99 percent since 1988, when Rotary partnered with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to launch the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. When the initiative began, polio infected about 350,000 children a year, compared with fewer than 700 for all of 2011.

Rotary's chief responsibilities are fundraising – to date, Rotary clubs worldwide have contributed nearly \$1.2 billion – and advocacy, a role of increasing importance as the end game draws near. Earlier this year, Rotary surpassed \$200 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.



Caption: End Polio Now Coordinator David Clifton, RI President Tanaka, RPIC Carol Toomey are at historic End Polio Now Advocacy meeting in Evanston, Rotary International Headquarters August 2012 along with 50 other Rotarians from all over the world.