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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rotary provides emergency response to polio outbreaks in Horn of Africa *Partners UNICEF and WHO to conduct immediate immunization activities in high-risk areas*

Evanston, Illinois (March 31, 2009) – In response to a recent outbreak of wild poliovirus that has spread from southern Sudan into parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, Rotary is providing US\$500,000 in emergency grants to UNICEF and WHO for immediate polio immunization efforts in the Horn of Africa. The outbreak requires urgent action by governments and partner agencies to again make the entire Horn of Africa region polio-free.

This emergency response is intended to reduce the threat of the virus spreading to other polio-free countries, a process called importation. The emergency grants support immunization activities taking place in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda from now through May 2009. Separately, immunization rounds continue in southern Sudan in an effort to halt the source outbreak.

“Polio importations highlight our global vulnerability to infectious disease,” said Carol Pandak, manager of Rotary International’s PolioPlus Program, “particularly where routine immunization is low and vulnerable children are missed. It highlights the fact that polio ‘control’ is not an option, and only eradication will stop polio in resource-poor countries.”

The progress made by polio-free countries in eradicating the wild virus and preventing importations is threatened by the persistent outbreak in Sudan. Outbreaks are not uncommon during eradication efforts, and although they do not lessen the feasibility of the eradication initiative, they do highlight the critical need to stop polio transmission in the remaining polio-endemic countries such as Nigeria and India, which have been responsible for exporting poliovirus to other nations in recent years. The only other endemic countries are Afghanistan and Pakistan.

“Experience shows that where polio transmission has been stopped before, it can be stopped again,” said Pandak. “A fast, large-scale, and high-quality immunization response and strong surveillance are absolutely critical to prevent the virus taking hold in the longer term.”

A highly infectious disease, polio can cause paralysis and sometimes death. As there is no cure, the best protection is prevention. For as little as 60 cents worth of vaccine, a child can be protected against this crippling disease for life.

With its spearheading partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative—the World Health Organization, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and UNICEF—Rotary’s commitment

to end polio represents the largest private-sector support of a global health initiative ever. Since 1985, Rotary has contributed more than \$800 million toward polio eradication.

Rotary is currently working to raise an additional \$200 million toward a \$355 challenge grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The resulting \$555 million will fund polio eradication activities in the remaining endemic and high-risk countries.

Besides raising and contributing funds, over one million men and women of Rotary have volunteered their time and personal resources to help immunize more than 2 billion children in 122 countries.

Rotary International is one of the world's largest non-profit humanitarian service organizations. It is comprised of 1.2 million business and professional leaders in 200 countries and geographical areas. Rotary members initiate community projects that address many of today's most critical issues such as clean water, health, hunger and the environment.

For further information, visit rotary.org/endpolio or polioeradication.org.

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