# NEWS RELEASE

**Bill Gates sends congratulations to Rotary for 30 years of successful polio eradication efforts via video message**

*Rotary pushes forward in its fight to eradicate polio worldwide*

**São Paulo (8 June 2015)** – In a heartfelt video message shared with attendees of Rotary’s 106 annual convention in São Paulo, business magnate and philanthropist Bill Gates congratulated the international humanitarian organization for 30 years of hard-work, determination and impressive results in its fight against polio.

The worldwide elimination of polio has been Rotary’s top priority since 1985, with members donating time and money to help immunize more than 2 billion children worldwide. Through the [Global Polio Eradication Initiative](http://www.polioeradication.org/), a public-private partnership that includes Rotary, the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the incidence of polio has plummeted by more than 99 percent, from about 350,000 cases a year to less than 400 confirmed in 2014. That same year, Nigeria – a country plagued by multiple polio cases as recently as 2012 – reported just six cases of polio, a 90 percent decrease. If there are no new cases reported in the country by 24 July 2015, Nigeria will have gone a full year without polio.

“Africa has never been closer to stopping polio than it is now. With a year of no polio cases in Nigeria tantalizingly close, and no case in Somalia since August, the tireless of work of so many across the continent is paying off,” said Dr. Hamid Jafari, MD, director of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative at WHO. “But this progress is hard won, and tentative. There is a lot we still need to do to make sure this change is lasting. There is no one better equipped to do this than Rotarians.”

Although there have been significant milestones in the fight against polio, such as India’s polio-free declaration in March 2014, there are three countries in which polio has never been stopped – Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, with the latter accounting for nearly 90% of the world’s cases of polio last year. Conflict, geographical isolation and insecurity continue to pose challenges to polio eradication in these areas. For more than two years, children in some areas of Pakistan had not had access to health interventions, including the polio vaccine. Funding for polio immunization activities over the next several years remains critical to ensuring the disease is eradicated.

“We are on the cusp of making history,” said Mike McGovern, chair of Rotary’s International PolioPlus Committee. “Rotary is committed to ensuring that no child will ever have to suffer the lingering and disabling effects of polio. Mr. Gates’ message is a reminder that it is imperative we remain steadfast in our commitment to wipe out this debilitating disease. Rotary’s leading role is vital to achieve a polio-free world”

Polio is set to become the second human disease ever to be eliminated from the world (smallpox is the first). To date, Rotary has helped 193 countries stop the transmission of polio through the mass immunization of children. Rotary continues to target countries where children remain at risk of contracting this incurable, but totally vaccine-preventable, disease.

In addition to immunization efforts, Rotary has donated a total of RL$3.4 billion (US$1.3 billion) towards the fight against polio with Brazilian Rotary clubs donating more than RL$44.5 million (US$15.0 million) to the cause. Rotary has also donated RL$18.9 million (US$6 million) to end polio in Brazil, as well as BRL$119.8 million (US$38.5 million) to Pan American Health Organization countries. Through the “End Polio Now: Make History Today” campaign, established in 2013, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will match two-to-one every dollar Rotary commits to polio eradication – up to RL$111.4 million (US$35 million) a year.

**About Rotary**

[Rotary](http://www.rotary.org/) brings together a global network of volunteer leaders dedicated to tackling the world’s most pressing humanitarian challenges. Rotary connects 1.2 million members of more than 34,000 Rotary clubs in over 200 countries and geographical areas. Their work improves lives at both the local and international levels, from helping families in need in their own communities to working toward a polio-free world. To access broadcast quality video footage and still photos of Rotary members immunizing children against polio available go to: [The Newsmarket](http://www.thenewsmarket.com/rotaryinternational).

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