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Note for the media WHO/Rotary International/CDC/UNICEF/9
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POLIO CONSULTATION REACHES BROAD CONSENSUS ON SPEEDING UP POLIO ERADICATION

Geneva: Today, governments, donors and international agencies leading the drive to eradicate polio expressed their support for a planned final attack on the poliovirus.

Indigenous wild poliovirus survives in only parts of four countries – Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan – where transmission has never been stopped. A high-level Consultation on polio eradication, at WHO headquarters today, concurred in raising, within 12 months, the levels of vaccination coverage and child immunity in the areas with endemic polio to levels that stopped the disease altogether in the polio-free parts of these countries. Ten other countries are currently fighting outbreaks caused by importations of poliovirus.

The Consultation outlined specific milestones in two areas where improvements would raise the coverage and immunity levels. First, by ensuring that vaccine reaches children by improving the quality of polio vaccination campaigns, strengthening health infrastructure and addressing security challenges, and by enhancing acceptance of vaccination, through tailored social mobilization and community engagement strategies. Second, the Consultation concurred that both domestic and international finances would need to be secured to fill the funding gap of US\$ 575 million for 2007-2008, and proposed specific steps to mobilize additional financing. The total cost of conducting polio eradication activities is US\$ 1.27 billion for this period.

The commitment of the four remaining polio-endemic countries remains strong and was re-affirmed by the presence at this Consultation of representatives from the offices of the Head of Government. Together these countries vaccinate a total of 250 million children many times each year. The Consultation defined specific milestones to monitor whether the collective capacity of all polio eradication stakeholders is being fully harnessed to make concrete and rapid progress.

The Consultation, called for by Margaret Chan, WHO's Director-General, was hosted by the World Health Organization, with top representation from the other spearheading partners of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative – Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF – together with representatives from the endemic countries' ministries of finance and health, major donors, political organizations and independent technical experts.

The eradication effort, predicated on reaching every child multiple times with oral polio vaccine, has reduced the number of polio cases worldwide by over 99%. Of the 193 Member States of the WHO, 188 have stopped transmission of indigenous wild poliovirus.

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