

The president's travels



SWITZERLAND—R.I. President James L. Lacy (left) and Rotary Foundation Trustees Chairman Robert R. Barth present a check in the amount of Sfr 10,000 for polio eradication efforts to Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, director general of the World Health Organization (WHO). The contributions were raised for the PolioPlus Program at a concert held at Victoria Hall in Geneva, co-sponsored by the Rotary Club of Geneva and WHO.

TAIWAN—R.I. President Jim meets with Lee Teng-Hui, president of Taiwan. The national leader announced that the government will pledge U.S. \$5 million in support of Rotary's PolioPlus Program—an amount that will be matched within five years by the Rotarians in Taiwan.



President Jim and Claudine Lacy celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary with Taiwan Rotarians during a special party in December 1998.

Rotary reacts to polio outbreak in Angola

The World Health Organization reports that an outbreak of more than 800 polio cases has been recorded in the central African country of Angola. Nearly all of the cases have been found in children under five; most victims are between the ages of one and two.

WHO officials believe that this outbreak is one of the largest epidemics recorded in Africa since the advent of the polio vaccine. On 8 April, the National Institute of Virology in South Africa identified wild poliovirus type 3 in the stool samples of children.

In response to the crisis, the chairman of The Rotary Foundation Trustees approved a Rapid Response Grant of U.S. \$350,000 to support immunization efforts in Angola. On 17 and 18 April, WHO and UNICEF worked with the Angolan Ministry of Health to conduct a mass immunization campaign that reached more than 630,000 children. Three rounds of National Immunization Days (NIDs) are also scheduled (starting in June) to wipe out the virus.

Health authorities report that the escalation of civil war at the end of 1998 resulted in large groups of displaced families moving into the overcrowded capital city of Luanda. WHO officials report that estimated vaccination coverage for the 1998 NIDs was less than 50 percent in three of Angola's 18 provinces.

To achieve WHO's target of polio eradication by the year 2000, polio immunization efforts must be intensified and accelerated to reach all areas of the country, including those not under government control.

"In Angola and other countries in conflict, reaching agreements for cease fires to carry out vaccination campaigns for polio eradication is becoming increasingly urgent," say WHO officials.

Health authorities are concerned that the virus may be reintroduced into neighboring countries by refugees, making it even more critical that all countries continue to be vigilant in their immunization efforts.

Rotary honors Taiwan president with polio award

R.I. presented Taiwan President Lee Teng-Hui with a special crystal Polio Eradication Champion Award for his country's commitment of

"With the strong leadership of President Lee Teng-Hui, and all the people of Taiwan, the last drive will be successful," said 1998-99 R.I. President James L. Lacy, who presented the award at a May ceremony in Taipei. "Building on the success of increasing levels of immunization coverage worldwide, Taiwan's committed funds will help in the final push to eradicate polio from the world," he said.

The Polio Eradication Champion Award recognizes world and regional leaders who have made outstanding personal contributions toward the goal of global polio eradication.

Over the last 10 years, the number of reported polio cases has declined by 90 percent and it has been more than two years since a case of polio was reported in the Western Pacific region. But WHO warns that the final years of the polio eradication drive will be the most difficult, with nations affected by years of war and civil unrest requiring substantial financial support to rebuild damaged infrastructures and conduct NIDs.

Rotarians bolster Bangladesh NIDs

Through Rotary's PolioPlus Partners Program, the Rotary Club of Kowloon East, Hong Kong, helped support NIDs held in Bangladesh. The club provided social mobilization tools such as stickers, posters, radio and television commercials, banners and billboards to publicize the mass immunization days.

The Hong Kong Rotarians were so dedicated to the cause that a group traveled to Bangladesh in February to assist in the vaccination efforts.

Bangladesh has substantially reduced the number of polio cases since launching NIDs in 1995. Health authorities are concentrating on eliminating the virus in "high risk" areas, which include densely populated urban slums and remote areas that are inaccessible by automobile.



This 15-month-old girl in Cambodia, Mum Chanty, has been identified as the last polio victim in the Western Pacific region. WHO reports there have been no other polio cases in this region for over two years.

U.S. \$5 million toward the global polio eradication effort. The contribution to Rotary's PolioPlus Program will be used to combat polio in some of the poorest countries of Africa and South Asia.