

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

GLOBAL POLIO ERADICATION CAMPAIGN

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The Situation

Tremendous progress has been made in the effort to eradicate polio since the World Health Assembly launched the global initiative in 1988, with the simultaneous goal of strengthening health capacity to control other major childhood diseases. In 1988, the polio virus existed in over 125 countries on five continents, and more than 350,000 children were paralysed due to poliomyelitis. By the end of 1999, the number of polio-infected countries had decreased to 30, and the incidence of polio fell to 7,012 reported cases. Polio has been effectively eradicated from the American, Western Pacific and European regions.

While a comprehensive polio eradication vaccination strategy exists, the challenge remains to conduct high quality National Immunisation Days (NIDs) in the remaining most difficult countries. Experts agree that a creative and enhanced approach is urgently required to eradicate polio from the remaining countries.

A New Partnership

In June, 2000, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), invited the International Federation and the ICRC to become partners in the Global Polio Eradication Campaign. The polio eradication campaign is led by WHO in partnership with Rotary International, the United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and UNICEF.

The partnership of the International Federation will bring to the campaign the support of the largest voluntary humanitarian movement in the world. With 176 National Societies, over 295,000 staff, and over 97,000,000 members and volunteers worldwide, the Federation is ideally placed to support the campaign with community-based trained staff in almost every country in the world.

The Federation is already engaged in worldwide health programmes, specifically with the African Red Cross and Red Crescent Health Initiative (ARCHI) 2010 which is intended to respond to the existing needs and to improve access to health of the most vulnerable in Africa, the Visiting Nurses Service

(VNS) in Russia comprised of 2,000 nurses who operate medico-social centres which give easier access to basic health care for vulnerable persons, as well as a TB campaign and HIV/AIDS/STD's initiatives in Africa and elsewhere.

The Federation joins a wide array of NGO's, Government, bilateral, and UN agencies, including: Rotary International who, in their PolioPlus programme, are providing volunteers (Rotary members and their families) to administer the polio vaccine during NIDs and to conduct house to house searches to ensure that every child is immunised; UNICEF who has provided manufacturers with a firm commitment to purchase the total amount of the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV); and CDC who have been instrumental in providing support, including "Stop Transmission of Polio" (STOP) teams (in collaboration with the WHO).

International Federation Action

With the goal of certifying the eradication of the polio virus by the year 2005, the Federation commissioned four health experts to review potential actions to support polio eradication initiatives in the 17 following countries: Chad, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan. The consultants reports are due by September 15. Based on this information, the Federation intends to launch an Appeal in the coming weeks to address the following preliminary objectives:

- The Red Cross Movement will collaborate in making a critical contribution in the WHO's "priority" countries to achieve the goal of global polio eradication by carrying out effective NIDs.
- National Society capacity to conduct awareness and social mobilisation activities for polio eradication and other health programs will be further developed.
- Collaboration and co-ordination between National Societies, the ICRC, the Federation, WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International and CDC will be maximised.

To facilitate the programme, the Federation has formed an internal Red Cross Polio Eradication Working Group as well as a similar external initiative with the ICRC to discuss the Movement's participation and the division of tasks necessary to achieve a maximum impact in the campaign. The group has met twice, and decided on the next steps which include Federation and ICRC delegations in the field participating in regional meetings under the auspices of WHO to create commitment and advance planning, and regional health delegations providing support, supervision and monitoring of National Society polio eradication activities.

To assist in planning the operation, the Federation urgently invites interested National Societies to establish contact by indicating ways in which the Federation can maximise its unique experience in this important campaign.

For more information from the International Federation, please contact Bradley Hersh: +41 22 730 4340; mobile (0) 79 217 3354; email: Hersh@ifrc.org or the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>

For further information from other participating organisations:

- ***World Health Organisation: www.who.int/gpv or www.polioeradication.org***
- ***Rotary International: www.rotary.org/programs/polioplus/index.htm***
- ***UNICEF: www.unicef.org/polio/***
- ***Center for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/***

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This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>