

International Development Minister thanks Brits fighting debilitating disease on World Polio Day

To mark World Polio Day this year, International Development Secretary Alok Sharma met with fundraisers, campaigners and polio survivors to thank them for their tireless efforts in the fight against the debilitating polio disease.

Speaking at the event, the International Development Secretary underlined the importance of support across society to end the disease, which can leave children unable to walk for the rest of their lives.

The commendable work of the Rotary Club's members was celebrated, with clubs around the world having raised almost \$2 billion to fight the disease. More than \$40 million of this was raised by the Rotary Club's 45,000 members in Great Britain and Ireland.

The UK is playing a leading role to eradicate polio, helping to immunise more than 45 million children around the world each year. The number of people contracting the disease around the world has been reduced by over 99.9% since 1988.

While only three countries in the world are yet to be declared wild polio free, experts predict that new cases could increase to 200,000 a year over the next ten years if efforts to fight the disease stall.

Speaking at the event, International Development Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Meeting with British people from across the country passionate about the fight against polio was a really uplifting moment. It was an honour to meet British polio survivors who have not only overcome adversity to succeed, but are now campaigning tirelessly to end the disease around the world.

We have made tremendous progress to fight the disease, and members of the Rotary Club here today have been pivotal in this, raising almost \$2 billion globally since efforts began.

The UK is the second largest government donor in the fight against polio globally, and this is something I am incredibly proud of. We need to continue this vital work to immunise children, both around the world and in the UK, to keep polio at bay.

If we were to pull back on immunisations, in a decade we could see 200,000 new cases each year, which would be a tragedy for the children and the families affected, but also the world.

British polio survivors from across the UK joined the event to talk personally about how the disease affected their lives and why it is vital we work together across the world to eradicate it once and for all.

Fundraising efforts led by the Rotary Club in the UK has included their famous "Purple for Polio" campaign, where fundraising efforts are themed by the colour dye used to mark children's fingers when they have received the polio vaccine. Creative fundraising events have included purple ice cream and teddy bears with purple jumpers.

There are now only three countries around the world that have not yet been declared wild polio free – Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria – with Nigeria not recording a case in the last three years.