



## ***RENEWED CALM IN MOGADISHU HELPS POLIO ERADICATION EFFORTS***

**NAIROBI, Friday 23 June, 2006** – Recent calm in the Somali capital allowed the humanitarian community to immunize 97% of Mogadishu children under five against polio. According to UNICEF Somalia Representative, Christian Balslev-Olesen, some 290,406 children were immunized in a round of vaccinations held between 11 and 13 June 2006. Mr Balslev-Olesen said, “We fully intend to keep up the momentum, so as to curb the spread of polio following last year’s outbreak.”

WHO Somalia Representative, Dr Ibrahim Betelmal, stressed, “We will seize this opportunity of increased access for the humanitarian community in the Banadir region, as well as the south and central zones, to intensify immunization campaigns to vaccinate children that have been missed thus far.”

Four additional National Immunization Days (NIDs) are planned for July, September, October and December this year, with each round aiming to reach an estimated 1.5 million children under the age of five.

The strategy for polio eradication in Somalia involves mass and repeated vaccination campaigns using monovalent oral polio vaccine. Somalia is in dire need of US \$7.7 million this year, to conduct additional rounds with the aim of stopping further transmission.

Since the beginning of the outbreak, in July 2005, 211 confirmed polio cases have been reported, 25 of which were identified in 2006. Some suspected cases are awaiting laboratory confirmation. Polio resurfaced in Somalia with an importation of the poliovirus from Yemen. Somalia recorded its last case of indigenous polio in 2002.

Of the Somali polio cases reported in 2005, 85% were from Mogadishu. However, repeated vaccination campaigns in the capital have yielded a good measure of success, with only 7 cases reported from the city in 2006.

There is guarded optimism that it will be possible to stop polio transmission in Somalia, citing the country’s polio-free status for nearly three years before the present outbreak: that success was due to repeated vaccination campaigns which took place despite the country’s political instability and security challenges.

In June 2006, a synchronized campaign was conducted in Somalia, and along shared borders of Ethiopia and Kenya, to ensure that coverage reached all target populations in these areas.

*The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is spearheaded by national governments, the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UNICEF. The polio eradication coalition includes governments of countries affected by polio; private sector foundations (e.g. United Nations Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation); development banks (e.g. the World Bank); donor governments (e.g. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Portugal, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America); the European Commission; humanitarian and nongovernmental organizations (e.g. the International Red Cross and Red Crescent societies) and corporate partners (e.g. Sanofi Pasteur, De Beers, Wyeth). Volunteers in developing countries also play a key role; 20 million have participated in mass immunization campaigns.*

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