- Pledges announced will enable over a billion children to be vaccinated
- Global eradication program will move simultaneously on multiple fronts expanding focus to improve childhood immunization and protect gains made to date
- New commitments by governments and philanthropists boost effort to meet plan's budget goal

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates ¦ 25 April 2013 – Today, at the Global Vaccine Summit , the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) presented a comprehensive six-year plan , the first plan to eradicate all types of polio disease – both wild poliovirus and vaccine-derived cases – simultaneously. Global leaders and individual philanthropists signaled their confidence in the plan by pledging close to three-quarters of the plan's projected US$5.5 billion cost over six years. They also called upon additional donors to commit up front the additional US$1.5 billion needed to ensure eradication.

The new plan capitalizes on the best opportunity to eradicate polio, with the number of children paralyzed by this disease at the lowest level ever: just 223 cases in 2012 and only 19 so far this year. The urgency is linked to the tremendous advances made in 2012 and the narrow window of opportunity to seize on that progress and stop all poliovirus transmission before polio-free countries become re-infected.

"After millennia battling polio, this plan puts us within sight of the endgame. We have new knowledge about the polioviruses, new technologies and new tactics to reach the most vulnerable communities. The extensive experience, infrastructure and knowledge gained from ending polio can help us reach all children and all communities with essential health services," said World Health Organization Director-General Margaret Chan.

A new plan to end polio, strengthen immunization systems and plan for transition

The Polio Eradication & Endgame Strategic Plan 2013-2018 was developed by the GPEI in extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders. The plan incorporates the lessons learned from India's success becoming polio-free in early 2012 and cutting-edge knowledge about the risk of circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses. It also complements the tailored Emergency Action Plans being implemented since last year in the remaining polio-endemic countries – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria – including approaches in place to vaccinate children in insecure areas.

At the Summit , held today in Abu Dhabi, global leaders announced their confidence in the plan's ability to achieve a lasting polio-free world by 2018 and pledged their financial and political support for its implementation.

"Ending polio will not only be an historic feat for humanity, but also a huge part of our efforts to reach every hard-to-reach child with a range of life-saving vaccines," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake.

The plan addresses the operational challenges of vaccinating children, including in densely populated urban areas, hard-to-reach areas and areas of insecurity. The plan includes the use of polio eradication experience and resources to strengthen immunization systems in high-priority countries. It also lays out a process for planning how to transition the GPEI's resources and lessons, particularly in reaching the most marginalized and vulnerable children and communities, so that they continue to be of service to other public health efforts. It is estimated that the GPEI's efforts to eradicate polio could deliver total net benefits of US$40-50 billion by 2035 from reduced treatment costs and gains in productivity.

Earlier this month, in a Scientific Declaration on Polio Eradication , more than 400 scientists and global health experts from around the world endorsed the GPEI plan, and reaffirmed the conviction that a polio-free world can be secured by 2018.

Philanthropists endorse value of investing in the end of polio

In remarks made at the Summit, Bill Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, underscored the numerous benefits of ending polio and the need to provide health and development interventions to the hardest-to-reach children. He also called on additional donors to come forward with long-term commitments to fully fund the GPEI plan.

"This plan isn't just a polio eradication plan, it's a global immunization plan with the goal of ending polio while improving efforts to protect all children, including the most vulnerable, with life-saving vaccines," said Gates. "Successful implementation of the plan requires a significant but time-limited investment that will deliver a polio-free world and pay dividends for future generations."

Gates announced that his foundation would commit one-third of the total cost of the GPEI's budget over the plan's six-year implementation, for a total of $1.8 billion. The funds will be allocated with the goal of enabling the GPEI to operate effectively against all of the plan's objectives. To encourage other donors to commit the remaining funding up front, the Gates funding for 2016-2018 will be released when the GPEI secures funding that ensures the foundation's contribution does not exceed one-third of the total budget for those years.

Joining Gates was a new group of individual philanthropists that announced its support for full implementation of the new plan. The total new pledges from philanthropists to the polio initiative amounted to an additional US$335 million toward the plan's six-year budget. The donors commended the tremendous progress toward eradication made in the last year and expressed their desire to help change history and end polio while the opportunity still exists.

Philanthropies making commitments include:

Albert L. Ueltschi Foundation
Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation-Global
Bloomberg Philanthropies
Carlos Slim Foundation
Dalio Foundation
The Foundation for a Greater Opportunity established by Carl C. Icahn
The Tahir Foundation

A fully funded plan and sustained political commitment will protect gains made to date and enable the GPEI to execute against short- and long-term objectives

At the Summit, leaders from polio-endemic countries reaffirmed their continued focus on polio eradication and welcomed the plan's broadened scope to improve immunization systems.

Praising the plan's expanded focus to ensure that polio eradication efforts – which reach the world's most vulnerable children – support broader health interventions, long-time donors Canada, Germany, Norway and the UK, as well as Nigeria, announced new commitments to support the plan's long-term objectives. His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, announced a second pledge to polio eradication of US$120 million, adding to his first contribution made in 2011. A range of other donors, including the Islamic Development Bank, Ireland and Japan, helped round out the additional pledges.

Rotary International, the flagship donor to the GPEI, pledged its commitment through 2018 to raise funds and mobilize support of the endgame strategy. "To stop polio once and for all, we need to act quickly so that children are fully protected and countries are not re-infected," said Rotary International President Sakuji Tanaka. "This takes the commitment of national and local leaders where polio still exists, the continued support of donor countries, and the steadfast commitment of heroic vaccinators."

The GPEI will work with donors on the timely conversion of these pledges into commitments and the disbursement of funds so that the program can fully deliver on the plan.

The plan's US$5.5 billion budget over six years requires sustaining current yearly spending to eradicate polio. The new plan's budget includes the costs of reaching and vaccinating more than 250 million children multiple times every year, monitoring and surveillance in more than 70 countries, and securing the infrastructure that can benefit other health and development programs.

"Today we have the fewest cases in the fewest places ever, making it critical to use the best opportunity the world has ever had to put an end to this terrible, preventable disease," said Anne Schuchat, M.D., head of the Center for Global Health at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus: On very rare occasions, the live, weakened poliovirus contained in the oral polio vaccine may genetically alter in the immunized person's gut. If a population is seriously under-immunized, the virus may begin circulating in the community, and is referred to as a circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV). Between 2000 and 2011 – a period in which more than 10 billion doses of oral polio vaccine were given worldwide – cVDPV outbreaks resulted in 580 polio cases. In the same period, wild poliovirus paralyzed more than 15,500 children. As wild poliovirus declines, however, the proportion of cVDPV in low-immunity communities rises. The new plan uses cutting-edge knowledge about these viruses and new tactics to raise immunity, including introduction of inactivated polio vaccine and phasing out use of the component of the oral polio vaccine which gives rise to the majority of cVDPV. If a population is fully immunized against polio, it will be protected against the spread of both wild and vaccine strains of poliovirus.

Additional resources:
Breakdown of pledges toward GPEI 2013-2018 budget – http://www.polioeradication.org/Financing.aspx
Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategy Plan Executive Summary – http://www.polioeradication.org/Portals/0/Document/Resources/StrategyWork/PEESP_ES_EN_A4.pdf
Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan Fact File – http://www.polioeradication.org/Portals/0/Document/Resources/StrategyWork/GPEI_Plan_FactFile_EN.pdf
Global Vaccine Summit Media Resources – www.globalvaccinesummit.org

About GPEI

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), launched in 1988, is spearheaded by national governments, the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UNICEF, and supported by key partners including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Since its launch, the incidence of polio has been reduced by more than 99 percent. In 1988, more than 350,000 children were paralyzed each year in more than 125 endemic countries. Today, only three countries remain endemic: Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Last year, cases of wild poliovirus plunged from 650 in 2011 to 223, the largest drop in a decade. As of 17 April, 19 cases have been reported, a 60% reduction compared to this time last year.