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NEWS RELEASE

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Shining the light on polio eradication

Historic Bonsecours Market will glow brightly with Rotary's promise to save the world's children from a crippling disease

MONTREAL (June 21, 2010) – Rotary International will put its campaign to eradicate polio squarely in the spotlight -- quite literally -- on the evening of June 21, during the humanitarian organization's annual convention.

That's when the exterior of Bonsecours Market in Old Montréal will become the latest landmark to blaze forth with the illumination, *En Finir Avec la Polio* (End Polio Now), symbolizing Rotary's determination to end this crippling childhood disease once and for all by immunizing the world's children. Other landmarks that have carried similar light displays include the Pyramids of Egypt, the British House of Parliament, South Africa's Table Mountain and the Sydney Opera House.

The program begins at 8:45 p.m. with the dramatic arrival of Rotary member and polio survivor Ramesh Ferris, of Whitehorse, Yukon, who will hand-cycle with a police escort from the Palais des Congrès. In 2008, Ferris, 30, raised CAD\$300,000 for polio eradication by hand-cycling across Canada (cycletowalk.com). Rotary is more than half way toward its goal of raising US\$200 million to match \$355 million in challenge grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, with all of the resulting \$555 million committed to polio immunization activities in polio-affected countries.

Also on hand will be Gilles Besner and Stewart Valin, representing Polio Quebec, a polio survivors' support group, who will recognize Rotary for its "unrelenting quest to eradicate polio," a goal more than 99 percent achieved. Accepting the award for Rotary International will be Dr. Robert Scott, chair of Rotary's International PolioPlus Committee. At 9:15 p.m., Dr. Scott, Besner and Ferris will throw the switch to begin the illuminated display, which will continue until midnight.

Polio eradication also will be front-and-center earlier in the day, when a soccer ball signed by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu and a host of other dignitaries arrives at the Rotary convention plenary session at the Bell Centre Arena on Monday, 21 June at 10 a.m. The arrival culminates Rotary's Kick Polio Out of Africa Campaign -- a four-month public awareness drive tapping the continent's excitement over the 2010 FIFA World Cup competition hosted by South Africa. The football passed through 22 polio-affected African countries enroute to Montréal. Presenting the football will be Rotary member Marie-Irene Richmond-Ahoua of Cote d'Ivoire.

"While most of the world is polio-free, it still threatens children in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East," said Rotary International President John Kenny. "Kick Polio Out of Africa' shows the tremendous resolve of the global community to come together to fight this disease. Rotary and its partners are committed to kicking polio out of Africa—and indeed—out of existence forever. "

Accredited journalists are invited to cover the Rotary International convention. Media passes are required to gain access to events at the Centre Bell Arena and Palais des Congrès. Accredited journalists can obtain media passes at the Convention Press Center at the Palais des Congrès, Room 522 A (Fifth Floor) - 514-789-3417 (opens 19 June).

A virtual version of the ball (www.kickpoliooutofafrica.org) was launched in May, and has gathered almost 10,000 online signatures. After the 2010 World Cup competition, the signatures will be formally presented to the other spearheading partners of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative: the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Beginning in 1985, when polio paralyzed more than 350,000 children in 125 countries every year, eradication has been Rotary's top philanthropic goal. Since then, polio cases have been slashed by 99 percent worldwide, with fewer than 1,700 cases in 2009. Just four countries remain polio-endemic: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan. However, other nations remain at risk for infections "imported" from the endemic countries.

As the volunteer arm and top private sector contributor in the polio eradication initiative, Rotary has contributed more than \$900 million and countless volunteer hours to immunize more than two billion children in 122 countries.

Rotary is a worldwide organization of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian service and help to build goodwill and peace in the world. Rotary's global membership is approximately 1.2 million men and women who belong to more than 33,000 Rotary clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas.

The Rotary International Convention will run June 20-23 at the Bell Centre and the Palais des Congrès. It is expected to draw about 17,000 registrants from 150 countries, pumping about CAD\$28 million into the local economy.

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