



## Massive Polio Immunization Campaign Protects Sudan's Children

Khartoum, 20 February -- In a continuing all-out effort to eradicate polio from Sudan, the Federal Ministry of Health of the Government of National Unity and Ministry of Health of the Government of Southern Sudan, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other partner organizations, today launched this year's first round of the national polio immunization campaign in Sudan, 20 to 22 February 2006. The goal of this first round is to immunize the estimated 8.1 million children under five years in Sudan, particularly those living in the poorest communities or those intermittently cut off by conflict. These children are the key to stopping the spread of the disease.

Sudan has succeeded in interrupting transmission of wild polio virus. No new cases of polio have been reported in Sudan since June 2005. The total number of confirmed polio cases in Sudan in 2004 was 127. During the first half of 2005, only 27 cases were reported bringing the total number of cases to 154.

Continued attention and vigilance is needed. The current major population and cross-border movements linked to conflict and displacement in the west and the return of refugees from neighbouring countries after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, ending two decades of conflict in Southern Sudan, could re-introduce the virus to Sudan. Reaching the children living in areas under conflict in Darfur is crucial to build the population immunity. The cooperation of armed groups is essential to avoid creating an immunization gap threatening the achievements of 2004 and 2005.

During the six national immunization campaign carried out in 2005, over 8.1 million Sudanese children under five years of age throughout Sudan were vaccinated during six rounds of immunization completed. It is the goal of this first round of immunization in 2006 to reach as many children. The immunization drive is crucial if further cases of infection are to be avoided among children. This year's campaigns are synchronized to happen simultaneously throughout the country.

In 2006, UNICEF, WHO, Rotary International and the Centres for Disease Control, among other partners, are supporting the cost of vaccines, logistics, vaccination teams and social mobilization efforts in Sudan.

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