

# UN hosts high-level polio eradication meeting today

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## Gates Foundation to open office in Abuja

AS part of efforts to ensure a polio free world, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon; will today host a high-level event on polio eradication in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York.



The event dubbed, “Our Commitment to the Next Generation: The Legacy of a Polio-free World”, according to a press statement by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) will bring together leaders of the remaining endemic countries, donor governments, development agencies, spearheading partners and representatives of the media, to draw attention to the urgent need for focus and commitment to eradicate the remaining one per cent of polio cases worldwide.

A global civil society festival will follow the event on Saturday, bringing together top artists with an audience of 60,000 to a concert in New York’s Central Park, to catalyse further action to end polio and extreme poverty.

Also, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Federal Government meant to promote sound healthcare of the poor in Nigeria. Minister of National Planning, Dr. Shamsuddeen Usman signed the MoU in Abuja with the Gates Foundation’s Director for Africa, Laurie Lee.

Laurie Lee said: “This is a fantastic opportunity for the Gates Foundation to work closely with the government of Nigeria and other partners to make some real gains in health and extreme poverty. We want to see children, mothers and farmers in particular in Nigeria given the opportunities to lead healthy and productive lives.”

Nigeria is an important focus country for the Gates Foundation, which currently provides more than \$400 million in funding to partner organisations that are operating health and development programmes across the nation. That amount includes funding to help eradicate polio, to support small farmers increase food production, and to empower women to seek healthcare during pregnancy and through improved access to contraceptives. These grants are part of the Gates Foundation’s overall work to expand access to childhood vaccines, improved agricultural tools and strategies, maternal and child health programmes, financial services for the poor, safe water and sanitation, and other effective, low-cost innovations.

The MoU enables the Gates Foundation to appoint a Country Representative in Nigeria and set up a presence in Abuja. Earlier this year, the Foundation placed its first two workers in Africa in Ethiopia and South Africa.

The Foundation has over 100 active grants in Nigeria with partner organisations that are either working in Nigeria or conducting research, development, or implementing activities designed to benefit Nigeria.

One example of the Foundation’s efforts to build effective partnerships in Nigeria is its funding support for the eradication of polio through international bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nation Children Fund (UNICEF), Rotary International and the World Bank. Working together with all levels of government and with traditional leaders in Nigeria, the Gates Foundation is committed to helping execute the National Polio Eradication Emergency Plan, it said in the statement.

Other examples of Gates-supported efforts in Nigeria include grants to the following:

- Society for Family Health (SFH) to improve care of newborns and pregnant women in the community, in northeast Nigeria;
- International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) to double the productivity of yams in major producing countries, helping raise incomes for smallholder yam producers and contribute to their food security and livelihoods; and
- Enhancing Financial Innovation & Access (EFInA) to support an innovation fund that promotes savings and branchless banking for the poor in Nigeria.

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Author of this article: **By Chukwuma Muanya**

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