

UVU Observes 8th Annual World Polio Day by Empowering Student Leadership

By Louyoko Nianza Christ Hermes, Student In political Science and Rotaract based in Utah /USA

Utah Valley University (UVU) proudly hosted its 8th Annual World Polio Day observation on October 23, 2025, reaffirming its role as a university where students lead through action, collaboration, and community impact. The event brought together students, faculty, Rotarians, and international experts to raise awareness and strengthen global partnerships toward eradicating polio, a disease that continues to challenge developing nations.

Organized by the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs including UVU Rotaract and the Foreign Affairs Club, in partnership with the Orem-Lindon Rotary Club, the event reflected UVU's engaged learning model, where students plan, manage, and host professional-level events under faculty mentorship. This hands-on approach allows students to gain real-world experience in diplomacy, event organization, and international collaboration, preparing them to become effective global leaders.



Group Photo fo UVU Students, Faculty, UIMF Members, and Rotary Leaders Gather to Celebrate the 8th Annual World Polio Day and Promote Global Health Initiatives – October 23, 2025

Student Leadership in Action and Global Lessons from the World Health Organization

Despite technical challenges at the beginning, student leaders showcased professionalism and teamwork throughout the event. Natalia Figaroa, President of the Foreign Affairs Club, opened the program with welcoming remarks, while Janessa Michelle Purcell, President of UVU Rotaract and the Utah International Mountain Forum, highlighted the power of youth collaboration in advancing humanitarian causes. Their leadership underscored how UVU students do not just learn about global issues in the classroom, they take ownership of them through concrete action and service.

The keynote address by Mr. Oliver Rosenbauer from the World Health Organization (WHO) offered deep insight into the complex political realities of polio eradication. He explained how vaccination campaigns often require delicate diplomacy in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Nigeria, where groups like the Taliban and Boko Haram influence access to vulnerable populations. "This is not a medical program anymore; it is entirely a political program to figure out how to reach the last child," Rosenbauer stated, reminding attendees that global health is inseparable from governance, culture, and peacebuilding.



Photo of Mr. Oliver Rosenbauer of the World Health Organization Delivers Keynote on Global Polio Eradication at UVU's World Polio Day 2025

Linking Local Action to Global Change

For UVU students, the event served as a living classroom, demonstrating how communication, negotiation, and cross-sector partnerships can save lives. The collaboration between students, Rotary International, and the WHO highlighted that local academic initiatives can have a global ripple effect. Rotarian Baktybek Abdrisaev and other community leaders shared Rotary's financial and volunteer efforts in fighting polio, emphasizing Utah's outstanding contributions, over \$5 million in recent years, to the global PolioPlus initiative.

This spirit of service deeply aligns with the Smart-Africanism philosophy, which advocates for transformative leadership, self-reliance, and innovative problem-solving to address Africa's development challenges.



Photo of Prominent Rotarians, Including Clark Merkley and Mike Rich alongside with students Like Antoine Mwamba, Erym Lammi, Roland Kabongo, Gather at UVU's World Polio Day 2025

Smart-Africanism and the Global Health Vision: A Continuing Legacy of Student Impact, A Model for Africa and the World

As a student Rotaractor and Global President of [Smart-African NGO](#), I recognize that the lessons learned from UVU's World Polio Day extend far beyond Utah. The strategies shared by WHO, negotiating with local authorities, building trust with communities, and ensuring inclusive access to healthcare, are directly applicable to Africa's public health systems.

For Smart-African NGO, which [promotes authentic and transformative leadership](#), and community-driven development, this event provided a valuable framework for how [youth engagement, education](#), and partnerships can combat not only diseases but also the social and political barriers that sustain them.

UVU's World Polio Day stands as a model of how education, transformative leadership, and civic engagement can converge to create tangible global impact. It demonstrates that student-led initiatives can influence international policy, strengthen community ties, and inspire other young leaders, including those from Africa, to contribute to global problem-solving.

Through partnerships like these, Smart-Africanism aims to replicate similar frameworks across African universities and youth organizations, promoting a culture of leadership that is globally aware and locally grounded.



Louyoko Nianza, Global Leader of the Smart-Africain NGO, draws inspiration from Global Health Lessons learned during UVU's World Polio Day.

UVU's World Polio Day Unites Rotarians and Students in the Fight Against Polio

The event brought together distinguished Rotarians and student leaders, showcasing the powerful partnership between Utah Valley University, Rotary International, and global health advocates. Notable attendees included Clark Merkley, past Orem-Lindon Rotary Club president Mike Rich, Cholpon Akmalieva, Debby Blad Bennion Lauret, Kerre Barrero Lewis, and Cherise Anthon Armstrong, alongside active student participants such as Aemish Brack, Curtis Bristol, Erym Lammi, and Antoine Mwamba. Their presence reflected the shared commitment to humanitarian service and global awareness.

Insightful remarks were delivered by Dr. Jay Desarte, Chair of UVU's Department of History and Political Science, and Janessa-Michelle Purcell, who both commended Rosenbauer for his inspiring presentation. They emphasized the importance of leadership, effective communication, and international collaboration in addressing global health challenges, while also encouraging students to engage in upcoming initiatives—particularly the 2026 study abroad program in Geneva.

The event concluded with heartfelt gratitude from Rosenbauer, who applauded UVU's ongoing efforts to raise awareness and resources in the fight against polio. UVU's World Polio Day celebration continues to serve as a vital platform for education, collaboration, and recognition of the collective efforts of WHO, Rotaract, and Rotary International to achieve a polio-free world.



Photo of Cherise Anthon Armstrong, Debby Blad Bennion Lauret, Kerre Barrero Lewis, and D.J. Smith" dorman j. Smith during the the event

About the Author

Louyoko Nianza is the author of "GO BACK TO AFRICA", founder of [SLSA](#), and Global President of the Smart-Africanism Ideology, and NGO. Originally from the Republic of Congo, he is currently pursuing political science studies in the United States, with a focus on transformative leadership and African empowerment.

As the proponent of Smart-Africanism, Louyoko advocates for authentic, visionary leadership to advance prosperity, unity, and sustainable progress across the African continent. He has represented marginalized communities, particularly women and girls in mountain regions of Utah and Africa, at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68 2024 and CSW69 – 2025), highlighting their challenges and promoting empowerment on a global stage. A dedicated Rotaractor and leader, Louyoko combines local engagement with international advocacy, connecting grassroots initiatives to broader solutions. His work continues to inspire and prepare the next generation of African leaders committed to positive social impact.