

Utah Valley University Rotaractors Observe 8th Annual World Polio Day

By Natalia Figueroa, Chief Protocol, UVU Rotaract and President, Foreign Affairs Club

October 23, 2025, Utah Valley University (UVU) proudly hosted its 8th Annual World Polio Day observation. The event was organized and led by UVU Rotaractors and students enrolled in the *Comparative Politics of Central Asia* course, under the mentorship of Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev. It was an inspiring day filled with learning, leadership, and collaboration, reflecting UVU's strong commitment to its Student-Engaged Learning (SEL) model. SEL model encourages students to work jointly in groups to solve practical problems, with teachers providing mentorship as needed.

The keynote speaker for the event was Mr. Oliver Rosenbauer, Communications Officer for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) under the World Health Organization (WHO). Based in Geneva, Switzerland, Mr. Rosenbauer joined us virtually through Microsoft Teams.



Natalia Figueroa starting the event with Mr. Rosenbauer on screen

As the Chief Protocol for this event, it was incredibly exciting for me to see all our preparation come together. Our entire team of student leaders and classmates worked hard to ensure the event was well-organized and meaningful. It was an honor to welcome Mr. Rosenbauer to speak to UVU students, faculty, Rotaractors, and local Rotarians. His presence and knowledge

gave everyone a deeper understanding of the ongoing fight to end polio and the global cooperation behind it.

During his presentation, Mr. Rosenbauer spoke about the World Health Organization's mission to completely eradicate polio and how Rotary's *PolioPlus* initiative, launched in Philadelphia in 1985, was a turning point in global vaccination efforts. He shared that since then, the number of polio cases has dropped by 99% worldwide, a historic achievement. Today, only 38 cases remain, found primarily in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Gaza Strip.



Students, Rotarians, and Uvu staff watches presentation of Mr. Rosebauer

He gave us a closer look at the real challenges behind these numbers. In these regions, WHO teams face dangerous and complex conditions while trying to deliver vaccines. Mr. Rosenbauer shared that WHO workers have collaborated with the Taliban in Afghanistan to allow vaccination teams access to children. Sadly, he also mentioned that some of his colleagues have lost their lives in this mission to protect others. His words were powerful reminders of the courage and dedication behind public health work.

One of the most moving parts of his talk was when he shared that the WHO team helped negotiate a temporary ceasefire between Hamas and Israel to safely deliver vaccines and

medication to children in the Gaza Strip. This act of diplomacy and compassion showed that even in times of conflict, humanity can unite for the wellbeing of children and communities. It was truly inspiring to learn how collaboration and determination can bring light to even the darkest situations.



Mike Rich and Clark _____ Orem-Lindon Rotarians take notes and watch Mr. Rosenabuers presentation.

The Student-Engaged Learning model played a central role in shaping how our team under my lead approached this event. Being directly involved in the planning, communication, and coordination provided me with real-world experience that cannot be gained from textbooks alone. As President of the Foreign Affairs Club and Chief Protocol, I oversaw all aspects of the event. I ensured smooth logistics, clear communication, and that our keynote and guest speakers were fully supported. I created a detailed task checklist, delegated responsibilities to every team member, and followed up consistently during class updates on Tuesdays, weekly meetings with club leaders, and even on weekends and weekdays. This ensured that all tasks were completed on time and expectations were clear. I also provided regular updates to our mentor, Dr. Abdrisaev, and to Janessa-Michelle Purcell, our club leader, to maintain alignment across the team. I am especially proud of the students in our Comparative Politics of Central

Asia class. They consistently followed instructions, completed their tasks, and proactively reached out with questions or for clarification. Sam Olesen and Antoine Mwamba prepared and asked questions for Mr. Rosenbauer, creating an engaging and meaningful discussion. Sasha Bird designed placement cards and organized seating for Rotarians, club leaders, and special guests. Garrett Bingham supported Sasha Bird by arranging extra chairs and taking photos to document the event. Each student contributed significantly: Alley Holt designed our poster, exceeding expectations; Kade Van Ry managed technical operations and media; Janessa-Michelle Purcell guided and mentored the team while moderating; Curtis Bristol coordinated with Rotarians and handled promotional materials; Erynn Lammi managed writing and communications; and Amish Brock advised on the script and logistics. I also want to express sincere appreciation to the Orem-Lindon Rotarians. Their support, guidance, and participation elevated the event and provided invaluable insight for our students. Additionally, the resources and encouragement provided by the History and Political Science Department and College of Humanities and Social Sciences made this event possible. UVU fostered an environment where students could take ownership, learn through action, and contribute meaningfully to global issues. Every member's professionalism, creativity, and leadership made this event a success. The experience became an important preparatory step for our upcoming Study Abroad trip to Geneva and New York. It helped me gain confidence in representing UVU on a global stage, connect with professionals in international diplomacy, and understand how teamwork, preparation, and careful oversight are essential in professional and global settings. The event also reinforced that student leadership is about more than organizing. It is about connecting classroom learning to real-world global issues and networking. The fight against polio is not just a medical mission but a call for unity, compassion, and persistence in particular between Rotarians, and Rotaractors under WHO leadership. As Mr. Rosenbauer said, "From a medical and technical point of view, we have the resources to eradicate polio—it's now a matter of commitment."

Natalia Figueroa President of Foreign Affairs Club at UVU