

Eradicating Polio: Global Commitment and Local Engagement



Mr. Oliver Rosenbauer delivers his keynote address on the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

On Thursday, October 23rd, at 11:30 a.m., I attended and assisted with the setup of the World Polio Day event hosted at Utah Valley University (UVU). There were approximately forty people, including students, faculty, and local members of Rotary International in attendance. The keynote speaker was Mr. Oliver Rosenbauer, Communications Officer for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) at the World Health Organization (WHO). The event was organized under the guidance of Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev and Janessa M. Purcell, with student introductions by Curtis Bristol, Natalia Figueroa and Aemish Brock. The event was both informative and inspiring, showing how efforts to eradicate diseases such as polio rely on international cooperation and direct on the ground operations.



Utah Valley University Rotaractors Host the Event

Mr. Rosenbauer's presentation highlighted the incredible progress made in eradicating polio, with 99.9% of cases worldwide eliminated. The final 0.1% presents the greatest challenge, particularly in Central Asian regions such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, where conflict, migration, and unreliable information on population movements hinder vaccination campaigns. Mr. Rosenbauer shared a poignant example of local involvement to stop the spread of Polio involving Japanese Rotarians. These rotarians work tirelessly in Pakistan at bus depots and train stations to administer vaccines to children coming from remote, sometimes inaccessible, border areas. Rotarians are very influential in high-risk areas due to their apolitical stance and dedication towards humanitarian work. Mr. Rosenbauer expressed his deep gratitude for Rotary international members who have assisted with acquiring funding and lobbying for the WHO in the UN, and for the support they provide in boots on the ground operations.

From a student perspective, attending this event connected principles of international relations to real-world action. As a political science student, I found it meaningful to observe how

leadership on the international stage, public policy, and local engagement combine in global health initiatives. This event demonstrated the practical application of international cooperation models discussed in class, showing how non-state actors like Rotary International can influence public health policy and diplomacy. The collaboration between organizations such as WHO and Rotary represents a fantastic example of how collective action and shared goals can lead to international change.



Students and local Rotarians gather for the World Polio Day event at Utah Valley University

Listening to local Rotarians speak added a personal dimension to the event. Growing up in Utah as well it was moving to listen to their comments reflecting on the excitement in being part of a movement that has nearly eradicated a disease that they were susceptible to many years ago. The event reminded me that meaningful change is not achieved overnight and depends on persistence, cooperation, and a shared commitment to improving the lives of others. Participating in this event left me with an appreciation for the role engaged citizens and organizations play in addressing global challenges. Mr. Rosenbauer's speech on how international health policy, service, and diplomacy converge in the effort to eliminate polio reinforced the value of student engagement with real-world events.

By Garrett Bingham, Senior, Utah Valley University, Political Science Major