Aemish Brock - Austria

Hello, my name is Aemish Brock. I am President of UVU Foreign Affairs and Vice President of the Utah International Mountain Forum. It is my honor to share what I have learned about the history of Polio eradication and Rotary International's "End Polio Now" campaign in Austria, the mountainous country I have been researching this semester.

Polio once posed a serious threat to public health in Austria, particularly among children. In 1947, Austria experienced its worst recorded polio epidemic, with more than 3,500 reported cases and over 300 deaths. Survivors often faced lifelong paralysis, and outbreaks continued throughout the 1950s. The turning point came in the winter of 1961 and 1962, when the Austrian government launched a nationwide oral polio vaccination campaign. The results were remarkable: reported cases fell from 292 in 1961 to just eight in 1962. Austria recorded its last polio case in 1980, and in 2002, the World Health Organization certified its European Region as free of indigenous wild poliovirus transmission.

Although Austria's original vaccination campaign was primarily government-led, Austrian Rotary clubs have since made important contributions to the global "End Polio Now" initiative. In 2018, Rotary Club Wien-West launched a project collecting plastic bottle caps for recycling, with proceeds supporting polio eradication. In 2020, Rotary Club Kirchdorf raised €2,000 for End Polio Now. In 2023, Rotary clubs Salzburg-Residenz and Gastein helped organize a charity jazz brunch, where Rotary District 1920 presented a €10,000 donation. Most recently, at the 2026 Salzburg Marathon, more than 70 participants from 19 Rotary, Rotaract, and Interact clubs helped raise an impressive €60,000 for End Polio Now.

Austria's experience demonstrates both the effectiveness of national vaccination efforts and the importance of international cooperation. Although polio has disappeared from Austria, Austrian Rotarians continue supporting the global effort to ensure that future generations everywhere can live free from this disease.