

## PRESS RELEASE

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# JAPANESE GOVERNMENT DONATES \$3.4 MILLION FOR POLIO ERADICATION AND TETANUS ELIMINATION

**ADDIS ABABA**, Ethiopia – Members of the Ministry of Health, the Japanese Embassy, UNICEF and WHO participated today in a signing ceremony in honour of the \$3.4 million donation by the Japanese Government to support polio eradication and the elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT) in Ethiopia.

“This generous donation by the Japanese Government will support our efforts to rid Ethiopia of the scourge of polio and protect children from its devastating effects of paralysis,” said UNICEF Representative Bjorn Ljungqvist at Monday’s ceremony. “In addition, we will use this money to achieve the national goal of less than one case of neonatal tetanus per 1,000 births in each district of Ethiopia.”

The Ministry of Health has been consistently conducting immunisation campaigns since 1996 in line with its national commitment towards the eradication of polio. The country has made tremendous strides as confirmed by the absence of wild poliovirus in Ethiopia since January 2001.

The Japanese donation will be contributing to two nationwide polio immunisation rounds in early 2005. The campaign will target 95 per cent of children under five nationwide or and estimated 14.2 million children.

Additional Japanese funds will also support three rounds of Tetanus Toxoid (TT) Supplementary Immunisation Activities for all women of childbearing age in nine selected zones in 2004-2005. A total of 2.72 million women of childbearing age will be targeted in the campaign.

The National Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) considers the elimination of MNT as one of the priorities of its disease control objectives. Ethiopia is ranked fourth in the world for the highest number of deaths due to neonatal tetanus with approximately more than 14,000 infants killed. It is estimated that some 2,000 mothers die every year due to maternal tetanus infection. Immunisation of women of childbearing age with at least three (optimal five) doses of TT vaccine provides complete protection against both maternal and neonatal tetanus.

Between 1999 and 2004, the Japanese Government has donated a total of \$20 million dollars to UNICEF for its prevention of infectious diseases and disease eradication activities for children in Ethiopia, including polio and neonatal and maternal tetanus.

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