

UNICEF WCAR PHOTO PROFILE: GEORGE WEAH UNICEF GOODWILL AMBASSADOR ON LIBERIA'S POLIO NIDS

In His Own Words:

"Hello, everyone! My name is George Weah and I am very happy that when I was a child, my parents made sure that I got all my polio vaccinations.

Because of that, I grew up healthy and strong and was lucky enough to become a famous football player. So, I'm asking all parents here in Liberia to please make sure that all of your children are vaccinated against polio during Liberia's National Immunization Days in October and November. By doing so, you'll be a champion for your children!"

A Champion for Children:

In his capacity as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, renowned international football star George Weah has joined the Liberian Polio National Immunization Days campaign, which will take place from 8-12 October and from 18-22 November 2004. Some of George's efforts so far have included the recording of several messages for radio which are now being broadcast throughout Liberia. George recorded the messages both in English and Kru, his traditional language, helping explain the urgent need for all of Liberia's children to be vaccinated against polio. "Young people look at me with respect, and they trust me", says George. "I tell children what I know and what UNICEF believes is important to tell them, and that includes the importance of being vaccinated against polio."

Mass Polio Communication Campaign:

George's polio messages are being broadcast over Liberia's radio stations as part of a mass polio communication campaign launched by the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare of Liberia, with financial and technical support from UNICEF, WHO, USAID, EU and Polio Plus Partners. The campaign aims to reach all households in war-weary Liberia, so that all of Liberia's 819,000 children under 5 years of age are vaccinated in the next rounds of Liberia's Polio National Immunization Days.

Now, More Important Than Ever:

Liberia joined the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a unique public-private partnership between WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International, CDC Atlanta, in 1999 and has conducted National Immunization Days ever since. However, the resumption of civil war prevented Liberia from conducting polio campaigns in 2003. This is of great concern because new cases of polio were recently confirmed in neighboring countries like Ivory Coast & Ghana, with whom Liberia shares an extended border and from where thousands of Liberian refugees are expected to return in the coming months. This is part of the reason why this year's National Immunization Days are more important than ever and will be synchronized with 22 other West and Central African countries. "In post-war Liberia, these National Immunization Days represent a landmark on the road towards peace, stability & development in Liberia", says Angela Kearney, UNICEF Liberia Representative. "They also represent a sign of hope for a brighter future for all Liberians. But these efforts will only be sustainable and long-lasting if the well-being of Liberian children continues to remain high on all agendas. That's why we invited George - a Liberian whose dedication to the cause of the children throughout the world is well known - to join us in the polio immunization campaign. The campaign not only includes George's participation, but also that of the 6,000 people forming the 1,500 vaccination teams in Liberia's 15 counties who will ensure that no child is left out." George Weah has served as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador & Special Representative for Sports since 1997.

Information For Media & Donors:

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UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, George Weah, helps raise awareness of the importance of Liberia's upcoming October & November Polio National Immunization Days. Photo: UNICEF Liberia