

# Never Give Up

**W**e have entered the last lap of our race to eradicate polio. This final stage of our race demands vim and confidence. Our war against polio is meeting with some unexpected challenges. But our race is on. Polio is dying but not yet dead. Probably the numbers have decreased but our determination to win the race must increase.

I would like to recollect the famous story of John Stephen Akhwari, an Olympic athlete from Tanzania who represented his country in the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. It was October 20, 1968 and the time was 7 P.M. The closing ceremonies had just been completed. As the spectators and other athletes were leaving the stadium, down the boulevard came the whine of sirens. People remained seated to see the last runner of the marathon making his way into the arena to the finish line. This was John Akhwari, who hobbled into the light. He had a horrible fall early in the race, whacked his head, damaged his knee and endured a trampling. He finished last among the 74 competitors. When asked why he continued to run and proceed to the finish line, John Akhwari said, "My country did not send me over 11,000 kms to start a race. They sent me over 11,000 kms to finish one."

It is not enough to know where the finish line is. You have to also be prepared to crash through quitting points you encounter on the way. So whatever hurdles we have faced in eradicating polio, we have to keep our hope alive. I say this because



*UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon administering polio drops.*

hope keeps you excited about the future.

We started our journey to finish polio and have succeeded in eradicating it from all over the world except in four countries. The task, at the beginning, seemed daunting. Some said that it was impossible. But Rotarians believed that it was possible. How do you get yourself to a point of believing? The way is to start make-believing. Your belief that you can do it, that undying faith, is your greatest power. Some of you may feel stuck or confined by the current circumstances. Some feel that the finishing point is getting a little farther. When we look at the difficulty in the last phase of this programme and define ourself by

that, then we doom ourself to have nothing more than the same in future. All that we are is a result of what we thought.

We have to think that the finish line is near and that we have to complete the race. During the last leg of this race we have to have that endurance to step up the pace and finish the race.

I urge you to please remember Winston Churchill's famous speech. He said, "Never, never, never, give up."



*Rtn. Ashok Mahajan  
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*The Rotary Foundation, 2009–2013*