

Health

Rotary International president leaves indelible mark on Ugandan healthcare

GEOFFREY SERUGO

The two-day visit of Rotary International President Francesco Arezzo to Uganda may have been brief, but its impact on the country's health sector promises to be lasting.

Accompanied by his spouse, Ann Maria Criscione-Arezzo, Arezzo arrived on February 20 for a whirlwind tour that took him from hospital wards to community health posts, all to witness firsthand the high-impact work being powered by Rotary.

While the itinerary was packed with stops; from the "Oxygen for Life" initiative at Kawempe National Referral Hospital to the bone marrow transplant centre in Lubowa, one event stood out as a defining moment of the trip was the official launch of a dedicated polio vaccination centre in the community of Jjanyi, Kajjansi, Wakiso district.

For over two decades, the Rotary Club of Kajjansi, alongside partners like the Rotary Club of Kampala South and Kampala Blue Hearts, has been showing up in Jjanyi every single month to deliver immunization services. What started as a consistent outreach effort finally took permanent root on February 23, when Arezzo officially commissioned the new vaccination centre in the area.

Rotarians, healthcare workers, local leaders, and families gathered to mark the transformation of decades of grassroots service into a lasting home for community health. Speaking at the launch, Arezzo didn't just praise the new building; he praised the spirit behind it.

"This is a powerful example of what sustained service can achieve," he told



Rotary International President Francesco Arezzo does vaccination against polio at Jjanyi, Wakiso

the audience. "For over two decades, Rotarians have shown up for this community. Today, that commitment takes a permanent form. This is how we will end polio by being present, consistent and community-driven."

The new centre is more than just a vaccination post. It was envisioned as a long-term investment. Club leaders from Kajjansi shared their hope that this facility would be the seed for a fully functional health centre, one that would continue to serve the children and families of Jjanyi for generations to

come.

As a founding partner of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, Rotary has helped reduce polio cases worldwide by over 99.9 percent. In Uganda, the fight is sustained by moments like this one in Jjanyi, where partnership, private sector support from organizations like dfcu bank and community trust come together to protect every last child.

Beyond Jjanyi, Arezzo's tour painted a full picture of Rotary's footprint in Uganda. At Kawempe National Referral Hospital, a major milestone

was announced with the launch of the \$500,000 "Mama Toto Care" Global Grant, aimed at bolstering maternal and child health. Arezzo reminded everyone that behind the statistics of Uganda's disease burden "is a family and a future at risk."

He described the bone marrow transplant centre in Lubowa as "a symbol of hope and resilience," praising the collaborative effort to bring curative treatment closer to home. During his visit at the Uganda Blood Transfusion Service in Nakasero, he emphasized that the work being done was "more than equipment, it is hope" and a chance at life for a child with severe malaria or a mother facing complications.

Throughout the visit, local Rotary leaders reflected on the significance of having the global president in their midst.

Geoffrey Martin Kitakule, the district governor, noted that the visit was a reflection to Rotary's collaborative spirit.

Meanwhile, Christine Kawooya Kyeyune, the governor of District 9214, highlighted how initiatives like the Makerere University Rotary Peace Centre are equipping young leaders to build harmony.

On the other hand, Emmanuel Katongole, the incoming Rotary International director for Zone 22, reinforced Africa's pivotal role in global health progress. For his part, past District Governor Kenneth Wycliff Mugisha saw the visit as a moment to celebrate the legacy and the bright future being built by Uganda's young Rotaractors.

In the end, as Arezzo's visit drew to a close, the lasting impression wasn't just left by his words, but by the actions he witnessed.

For one, the new vaccination centre in Jjanyi stands as a permanent reminder that the fight to end polio is won not by global strategy alone, but by showing up, month after month, year after year, in the communities that need it most.