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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

EVERY LAST CHILD

EVERY LAST CHILD is the dramatic story of five people impacted by the current polio crisis in Pakistan. Taking place on the front line of the fight against the disease, it is a story of sacrifice, fearless determination and sorrow in the face of mistrust, cynicism and violence.

Just a few years ago, polio persisted in only three countries and the number of victims was steadily decreasing. Pakistan was the key battleground with over 80% of all endemic cases. However, when the Pakistan Taliban issued a ban against the polio vaccination program, and incited fatal attacks against vaccinators, Pakistan's campaign was thrown into disarray. Today families and healthcare workers find themselves in the cross hairs of politics and bloodshed as they attempt to protect their children from polio. At this critical time, when we are closer than ever before to global eradication, increased international support and commitment can see the end of polio, once and for all.

Through the vivid stories of its five subjects—a medical specialist, a vaccinator, a vaccination skeptic, an adult polio victim and a sick child—we are drawn in to the desperate search for a solution to this devastating disease. Will these everyday heroes succeed and end polio in our lifetime, or will another young generation be at risk?

EVERY LAST CHILD is the dramatic story of five people involved in the World Health Organisation's (WHO) most recent attempt to eliminate polio in Pakistan. It records their sorrow and sacrifice, and their fearless determination in the face of deadly cynicism.

A multi-billion dollar polio eradication programme, launched in 1988, had brought the campaign to the brink of success: by 2012, polio persisted in only three countries and the number of victims was steadily decreasing.

Pakistan was the key battleground – with over 80% of all endemic cases. Stop polio there and the 25-year battle would be won. Two years ago, cautious optimism was the order of the day. That was until the Pakistan Taliban issued a ban against the polio vaccination programme and violent attacks against vaccinators began with fatal consequences. Pakistan's vaccination campaign was thrown into disarray.

Dr. Elias Durry, an Ethiopian doctor working for the WHO, with previous success in eliminating polio in several African countries was thrown into the fray. Many saw his mission in Pakistan as a poisoned chalice.

Gulnaz Sherazi, team leader of a group of vaccinators in Karachi, saw her niece and sister-in-law gunned down in front of her. Her response was to recruit other members of her family and continue her work.

Zabih-Ullah watched helplessly as doctors confirmed the worst news possible. His 18-month old son will be crippled for life. Although extremely poor, he has but one goal - to get his son proper rehabilitation.

Zubair Rabi, and his friends from the tribal region, are convinced of one thing: that this huge emphasis on polio eradication by the Western powers, especially when there are so many other health needs in Pakistan, is clear proof of a determined conspiracy to undermine the Muslim Nation and weaken the people.

Habib Masud, also from the frontier, is all too familiar with the devastation polio brings. He contracted it when he was 9 and knows how it attacks the young, the innocent and the vulnerable. What often appears to be an innocuous fever can, within hours, leave a child handicapped for life. The paralysis spreads upwards from the feet, destroying nerve tissue as it progresses. In particularly severe cases, the paralysis continues up to the arms, and stops the muscles needed to breathe. The child slowly turns blue as exhaustion sets in before losing the fight for life. Perhaps Habib was a one of the luckier ones – he survived, although severely disabled. His outlook on life is surprising – and refreshing in a world so self-centered.

EVERY LAST CHILD brings these five powerful characters together in a story vivid in detail and intense with feeling, against the background of the desperate search for a solution to this devastating childhood disease.

Eliminating Polio Forever – Why Should We Care?

By Tom Roberts

First published in *The Huffington Post*
24 December, 2014

A quarter of a century ago, a million children's lives were ruined or lost to Polio every three years - today that number is just 400 a year. A disease that was once endemic in 125 countries is now confined to just a small handful - in Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As the world focuses on the growing Ebola crisis in West Africa, another tragedy is brewing, thousands of miles away. Polio is threatening to return. We can and must continue our efforts to eradicate it - we are so close - or we risk a new global epidemic that will bring with it pain, suffering and death to millions of children.

Two years ago, I assumed Polio - as many do - was a problem of the past. Then I was contacted by Image Nation, a studio based in Abu Dhabi. They were looking for a director to make a film about the latest efforts to exterminate polio. They had big plans, seeking to revive interest in this almost forgotten worldwide public health campaign.

As I put down the phone, I asked myself a question. Why should we care about polio today? And why should I, in particular, devote a year of my life to a cause that seemed to have been won already? But I promised to look into it and within a week I was hooked. Scratching the surface, I found a fascinating microcosm of the ills that currently beset our planet. This personal journey, in turn, led to the creation of *Every Last Child*, my documentary on the Pakistan Polio epidemic, which will be released in 2015.

There is still a real job to do. Despite its absence from the front pages, the Pakistani eradication program - where over 80% of the cases occur - has stalled. It is continually disrupted by violent attacks on vaccinators, who are mostly poor women paid just a few dollars a day. Dozens were shot dead following a fatwa issued by the local Taliban in the summer of 2012. Polio cases are on the rise and the virus is turning up ever more frequently in environmental samples. Worse still, the Pakistani strain of the virus has broken out of the region and has infected children in war-torn Syria and Iraq.

What has gone wrong? Why has a previously successful public health programme, designed to save children from a lifetime of suffering suddenly in the crosshairs? The answer is complex, and understanding that is what *Every Last Child* set out to achieve.

So what did we find? Extreme poverty, local corruption and inefficient public

services in Pakistan has slowed the effort. Poor sanitation, floods and earthquakes have made their contribution too. But such barriers have been overcome in India, Somalia and dozens of other countries with similar difficulties.

The real difficulties the Pakistan, despite the Government prioritizing polio, are not developmental problems, but a deep ideological resistance. Among the tribal peoples of the Hindu Kush, the belief is that the polio program is a western plot designed to disadvantage or weaken Muslims.

The conspiracy theories I encountered were fanciful. Some told me the vaccine would make Muslim girls more fertile and the boys impotent (what would Sigmund Freud have made of that?) Others said it was a slow poison that worked like AIDS - which of course had been invented in the West and exported to Africa to weaken the continent. One individual even managed to come up with a theory involving the CIA and the Bermuda Triangle.

Any national public health campaign, coordinated - as it must be - from the center, would instinctively arouse suspicion among people who feel disenfranchised. Why would the international community spend so much and make such an effort for polio alone? Weren't there other, more pressing health needs, like combating measles (a killer of thousands) or dysentery? For some that alone was proof enough of a conspiracy.

Resistance to vaccination campaigns is not just limited to Pakistan's tribal belt, or indeed to disenfranchised or poor communities. Not long ago, thousands of sophisticated middle-class parents in the UK refused to give their children the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine because of a false report that it was associated with autism. Attempts to dispel their fears by scientists fell on deaf ears. The consequence - dramatic increases in these childhood diseases throughout the UK.

Fortunately, for the majority of Pakistanis, such anti-science ideas hold little sway. Active resistance to polio vaccination is only found in the tribal areas or in the urban neighborhoods which host Pashtun refugees fleeing natural disasters and the conflict in their homeland. In fact, many of the polio vaccinators consider it their Muslim duty to work on the program because of the Islamic principles of charity and social justice. Thousands turn up on campaign days in the full knowledge they are putting their lives in serious danger - a risk we have all been reminded of in week when the Taliban mounted its horrific attack on a Peshawar school that killed over 100 people, mostly children.

Before the eradication program came to Pakistan, some 20,000 children were crippled each year. The country's streets are still littered with the broken bodies of polio victims begging for a crumb. The volunteer vaccinators instinctively understand that if the campaign falters or fails, those numbers will return within a decade (official estimates predict 400,000 victims a year worldwide). The Pakistani people, despite all their difficulties, are working hard to end polio forever. We must share that burden and match their commitment with solidarity. It is a struggle humanity must win.

The Filmmakers

TOM ROBERTS

Writer, Producer & Director

Tom Roberts is a multi-award winning documentary film director, founder of the production company October Films, and a producer/executive producer with dozens of films to his credit. Having extended his directing work into drama in 2013 he completed a drama-documentary on Nelson Mandela for ITV. He also directed his first feature film, *In Transit* starring John Malkovich, Thomas Kretschmann, Daniel Bruhl and Vera Farmiga.

Roberts began his directing career at the BBC in 1980 before leaving to make *The Other Europe*, Channel Four's epic series on communism in Eastern Europe. Soon after, Roberts founded his own production company, October Films, rapidly building a reputation for producing distinctive feature-length documentary films. The company has won over one hundred international awards.

Throughout this time, Roberts continued to direct, making films on subjects as diverse as Stalin's purges, the Arab/Israeli conflict, the crisis of manhood in South Africa, and a controversial series about runaway children in the UK.

He produced and directed a trilogy about the wars of 9/11: *Afghanistan's Dirty War* investigated the deadly bombing of Azizzabad, *The Insurgency* was the first serious investigation of the Iraqi opposition, and *A Company of Soldiers* followed a combat team in Baghdad. The latter two films were nominated for a BAFTA and a Grierson award – adding to Tom's personal total of over 45 awards and nominations.

PAUL CARLIN

Editor

Paul Carlin has edited feature films and documentaries in the UK and overseas for over twenty years. His work covers a variety of genres, from high-budget features to low-budget documentaries. Also an accomplished music editor and published writer, Carlin teaches editing at the London Consortium.

His award-winning documentaries include *Baby It's You* (Emmy), *The Death Train* (Hugo Award) and *Staying Lost* (BBC Indie Awards).

ALI FAISAL ZAIDI

Director of Photography

Ali Faisal Zaidi is a freelance journalist and cameraman based in Islamabad, Pakistan. In a career spanning over 25 years, he has earned acclaim for his work both as a writer and as a visual storyteller while operating in some of the world's most difficult environments: conflicts in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq; the tsunami in Indonesia and Sri Lanka; earthquakes in Iran and Kashmir; and floods in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

From a family of journalists and filmmakers, Zaidi initially began working in media while completing his undergraduate degree at Harvard University. He has written for several Pakistani newspapers and journals, broadcast radio for Voice of America, and produced for the Associated Press TV.

Over the past 16 years Zaidi's work has primarily been as a Video Producer for BBC Television News, shooting, editing, and often producing news, features and short documentaries, working with BBC correspondents all over the world. He was part of the team nominated for an Emmy for coverage of the catastrophic floods in Pakistan in 2010.

Every Last Child is Zaidi's first feature-length observational documentary, and he hopes to focus more on long format storytelling in his future pursuits.

EVERY LAST CHILD

Written, produced and directed by	Tom Roberts
Edited by	Paul Carlin
Director of Photography	Ali Faisal Zaidi
Original Music by	Nitin Sawhney
Producer, Pakistan	Sabin Agha
Sound & Additional Photography	Sana Ullah
Head of Production	Anna Melin
Executive Producer	Danielle Perissi
Associate Producer	Rebekah Clark

An Image Nation Abu Dhabi production

Principal participants:

Dr. Elias Durry

Gulnaz Shesazi

Habib Rehman

Zabih Ullah and his son

Zubair Rabi

2014 - U.A.E. / Pakistan - 85 mins - Color
In English, Pashtu & Urdu with English subtitles
Aspect ratio: 16:9 - DCP, HD-Cam & Blu-ray
Sound: Stereo & 5:1

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