



25 August 2020 - Today, the independent Africa Regional Certification Commission certified WHO's African Region as wild poliovirus-free after 4 years without a case. Finally, the world can breathe a sigh of relief as the scourge of wild poliovirus is certified eradicated from the entire African Region.

This historic milestone marks the culmination of decades of work following the launch of the "Kick Polio Out of Africa" campaign in 1996, at a time when wild poliovirus paralysed around 75 000 children across the Region every year. Africa's last wild poliovirus paralysis case was detected in Borno State, Nigeria, on 21 August 2016. Since then, no cases of wild poliovirus have been reported in the presence of certification standard surveillance. With this immense achievement, over 90% of the world's population now lives in polio-free regions.

To mark this momentous occasion, the WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, said:

"Enormous congratulations are due to all Member States in the African Region, to WHO colleagues, and to our partners in the field. The road to eradication is long and difficult, and for the African Region, the fifth WHO region to be certified polio-free, it has included multiple setbacks along the way. The dedication of the health workers who have made this achievement possible is to be applauded. As those of us in the Eastern Mediterranean Region celebrate this achievement with our friends and allies in Africa, we feel a renewed sense of purpose in our mission to complete polio eradication in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Eastern Mediterranean Region is the world's remaining polio-endemic region. Never before has our task felt so vital – and also, so achievable. Africa's triumph today shows the entire world it is possible to eradicate polio."

"Even as we can say with confidence that we have kicked wild poliovirus out of Africa, we also know that other strains of polio are on the rise. Vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV) is a threat to children wherever immunity levels are low, and outbreaks are ongoing in countries in the African and the Eastern Mediterranean regions. The path forward is simple: we must reach every child, everywhere, every time, with polio vaccine. I've seen the work of my colleagues in the African Region to defeat wild poliovirus, as well as manage and mitigate VDPV outbreaks. All strains of poliovirus are a global health risk, but they can be beaten – and I believe that by working together we will beat all poliovirus strains."

"Despite the ongoing shadow cast by the COVID-19 pandemic and the toll it has taken on so many health programmes, health workers across WHO's African and Eastern Mediterranean regions have worked hard to restart vaccination activities in a cautious, safe way to arrest a growing immunity gap exacerbated by the pandemic."

"These efforts are to be saluted, because they show us what polio eradicators have long known:

alongside committed governments, communities and partners, we can overcome all challenges and achieve what some once called impossible. Today, as Africa kicks out wild polio, we know this to be true.”

Visit the [‘Africa kicks out wild poliovirus’](#) site to learn more about the path to a wild poliovirus-free Africa and to access social media assets.

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