



WHO Regional Director Dr Mahmoud Fikri (centre) meets with H.E. the President of Pakistan Mamnoon Hussain Islamabad, 2 April 2017 – Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, visited Islamabad, Pakistan, from 30 to 31 March. During his first official visit to the country, Dr Fikri met with several high-ranking officials, including the President of Pakistan Mamnoon Hussain, the Minister of State for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Saira Afzal Tarar, and the Prime Minister’s Focal Person for Polio Eradication Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq, and attended the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meeting on polio eradication.

Meeting with President Mamnoon Hussain, Dr Fikri expressed his deep appreciation to the Government of Pakistan for their commitment and leadership to the polio eradication programme. “The tremendous progress in the polio situation in Pakistan would not have been possible without the political leadership and commitment at every level,” said Dr Fikri, who assured the President that WHO would extend all possible support to the Government of Pakistan in its endeavours to improve its health sector.

During his visit to Pakistan, Dr Fikri also met with the Minister of State for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Saira Afzal Tarar, who briefed him on joint programmes and interventions such as the National Health Vision 2016–2025, the Prime Minister’s Health Insurance Programme, the plan for implementing family practice in 10 selected districts, the roadmap to strengthen the national health information system and the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan.

Meeting with the Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq, Dr Fikri thanked her for her remarkable commitment to the programme. Senator Farooq, on behalf of Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, oversees the management of a network of Emergency Operation Centres, one at the national level and 5 others across the provinces of Pakistan.

Speaking at the TAG meeting, Dr Fikri renewed WHO's commitment to the Government of Pakistan stating, "No stone will be left unturned to support the country in its relentless efforts to achieve polio eradication. I am very encouraged to see the progress that Pakistan has achieved and I am confident we will soon eradicate polio forever."

At the conclusion of the meeting, the TAG commended the Government of Pakistan for the progress made over the past 9 months toward eradicating polio and urged the programme to maintain high-level performance across the country, with a special focus on decreasing the number of missed children within core reservoir areas and mobile populations, while also strengthening coordination with Afghanistan, which constitutes the same epidemiological block as Pakistan.

Since 2014, the progress made in the polio situation in Pakistan has been built on a very solid foundation of government commitment and support, strengthened programme performance and broad community acceptance. As a result, the number of children paralysed by the wild poliovirus has dropped from 306 cases in 2014, to 54 in 2015, 20 in 2016, and only 2 so far in 2017.

The Emergency Operation Centres have been an essential platform for Government staff and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative partners to come together and has played an instrumental role in the progress made over the past 2 years. Thanks to the centres, the programme is now driven by high-quality data and comprehensive, real-time risk assessment and monitoring, resulting in better campaign quality overall.

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