

By Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean

24 February 2022, Cairo, Egypt – I am shocked and deeply outraged by the killing of 8 polio health workers, 4 of them women, in Afghanistan today. I extend my deepest condolences to the families, friends, and colleagues of those who have lost their lives.

As a result of these attacks, the national polio vaccination campaign, which began on 21 February 2022, has been suspended in Kunduz and Takhar provinces. This suspension leaves thousands of children unprotected and exposed to a life-threatening disease that can result in permanent paralysis.

These senseless attacks must stop. They are unacceptable on a humane level and a humanitarian level and are strictly forbidden in all faiths. These cowardly acts ultimately only harm innocent children who must be given every opportunity to live safe and healthy lives.

WHO condemns all attacks on health workers in the strongest terms and appeal to the Taliban Authorities to immediately identify and bring the perpetrators to justice.

The polio programme supported by WHO, UNICEF and other partners has made extensive progress in controlling transmission of wild poliovirus in Afghanistan, contributing to global eradication of the disease. In 2021, Afghanistan reported 4 cases of wild poliovirus, and only one case has been reported to date in 2022.

This month's campaign planned to target nearly 10 million children aged 0–59 months across the country. In addition to this round, 4 more campaigns are planned for 2022. The polio programme requires everyone's support to ensure they are implemented without any risk to health workers, or the people they serve.

WHO, together with national and international partners, remains committed to our polio eradication efforts in Afghanistan.

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