

24 January 2017 – Humanity is on the verge of one of the greatest public health achievements in history – eradicating polio. In 2016, fewer children were paralysed by polio than in any other year globally, and in Pakistan. Despite many challenges faced by the polio programme, Pakistan has made strides towards stopping transmission and in 2017 is the closest it has ever been to reaching that goal. After many years the highly transmittable yet vaccine preventable virus is finding that there are very few places left to hide.

In 2016, thanks to the support of the United Arab Emirate's Pakistan Assistance Programme polio campaign phase III, more than 10.6 million children across Pakistan's highest risk districts were reached with the most vital health intervention for protection against polio: 2 drops of oral polio vaccine (OPV).

The generous contributions of the United Arab Emirates towards polio eradication in 2016 cannot be underestimated and has contributed significantly to the turnaround seen in Pakistan since 2014. Two years ago, Pakistan reported 306 wild poliovirus cases. Transmission was widespread across the country with all of the Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), most of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, many parts of Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab reporting cases. In less than 18 months, a reinvigorated programme has been able to first stem the tide of uncontrolled transmission and tackle the more chronic underlying challenges that have proven obstacles to virus interruption and eradication. A fundamental paradigm shift towards reaching and vaccinating missed children among the 37 million target under 5 population has seen missed children reduced to historic lows.

With the support of funds from the United Arab Emirates, highly committed and dedicated staff in the field have accessed and facilitated access to the most high-risk districts, vaccinating some of the most vulnerable children, some of whom would otherwise not have been reached by any health service. Through a series of well-planned, high-quality immunization campaigns financially supported by the Emirates polio campaign Phase III for 66 high-risk districts across Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA and Sindh, the programme has made efforts to reach previously missed children.

The financial contribution made through WHO Pakistan has ensured that more than 71.5 million polio drops were received by vulnerable children in Pakistan. It also helped to cover incentives to polio frontline workers, in addition to the associated operational costs of the campaigns in identified districts, enabling WHO to continue strengthening capacity and outreach in the most difficult part of Pakistan.

“We are extremely grateful to the United Arab Emirates and the Director of the Pakistan Assistance Programme, Mr Abdullah Khalifa Al Ghafli, for the multi-year long commitment shown in ending polio in Pakistan. The generous and unwavering support the United Arab Emirates continues to show to Pakistan is making all the difference. Without it, the programme would be lacking what it needs to push to the end,” said Dr Michel Thieren, WHO Representative to Pakistan.

The United Arab Emirates has long played a pivotal role in supporting global eradication efforts. In 2013, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces announced a commitment of AED 440 million (US\$ 120 million) in support of global efforts to put the world over the finish line for polio eradication, with a focus on Pakistan, one of the last endemic countries.

In 2016, as part of the Emirates Polio Campaign Phase-III, a total of US\$ 18.4 million was contributed to the polio programme in Pakistan through WHO for 66 high-risk districts in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA and Sindh that were identified for support. Through this initiative, more than 10.6 million children have been administered polio drops in each of the 3 phases of the campaign supported by the United Arab Emirate's Pakistan Assistance Programme between March and December 2016.

Overview of the United Arab Emirate's support to the Polio Eradication Initiative

In 2016 the United Arab Emirates contributed US\$18.4 million to the Polio Eradication Initiative in Pakistan through WHO to cover incentives to polio frontline workers, in addition to the associated operational costs during the supplementary immunization activities in 66 high-risk districts of FATA, KPK, Baluchistan and Sindh.

- Through this initiative, more than 10.6 million children have been administered polio drops in each of the 3 phases of the campaign supported by the Pakistan Assistance Programme between March and December 2016. From March to December 2016 over 71.5 million polio drops were given to children during the campaign in 66 districts.
- This contribution helped to reach children in the most insecure areas through the support of the security forces.
- The financial support has allowed the programme to increase the incentive rate to frontline workers, which adds to motivation.

The United Arab Emirates has played a pivotal role in supporting global eradication efforts: in 2013 His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces announced a commitment of AED 440 million (US\$ 120 million) to back the polio campaigns in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Saturday 20th of April 2024 05:11:14 AM