Statement by the Eastern Mediterranean Ministerial Regional Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks

Delivering on a promise: achieving and sustaining a polio-free Eastern Mediterranean Region

Fourth Meeting of the Regional Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks

9 February, 2022 – Noting the progress achieved globally in eradicating poliovirus transmission since 1988;

Noting with deep concern the ongoing and expanding outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) in the Region, including a concurrent outbreak of cVDPV1 and cVDPV2 in Yemen;

Recognizing the high risk of persistence and expansion of the two polio outbreaks in Yemen in the setting of low levels of immunity to polio due to disruption in childhood immunization and gaps in coverage of supplementary vaccinations campaigns and evidence of international spread of the outbreak;

Recalling that the spread of polio is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern under the International Health Regulations (2005);

Recognizing the impact of prolonged conflict on disruption of health services, including implementation of house-to-house vaccination campaigns that ensure all vulnerable children can be reached with life-saving polio vaccines;

Understanding that recent escalation in conflict has further reduced the scope of house-to-house polio vaccination in Yemen thereby increasing the risk for continuation of polio outbreaks and increasing the threat of polio paralysis for children in Yemen;

Noting the new global Polio Eradication Strategy 2022-2026 – Delivering on a Promise, laying out the roadmap to securing a lasting world free of all forms of poliovirus, including circulating vaccine-derived polioviruses;

In particular, noting the unique and realistic opportunity to ensure that no child in the Region will ever again be paralysed by any form of poliovirus, and giving the Region one less infectious disease to worry about once and for all;

We, the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks:

DECLARE:

1. The ongoing circulation of any strain of poliovirus in the Region to be a Regional Public Health Emergency; and,

COMMIT TO:

2. Enhancing engagement and support by all political, community and civil society leaders and sectors at all levels, needed to fully resolve the afore-declared Regional Public Health Emergency;

3. Supporting Yemen to fully implement the temporary recommendations issued by the Emergency Committee on Polio Eradication under the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005), including to support them in declaring any confirmation of circulating poliovirus to be a national public health emergency and ensuring highest-level oversight for outbreak response;

4. Supporting Yemen in mobilising all necessary resources to fully implement outbreak response across the country;

5. Helping to strengthen coordination with other public health and humanitarian efforts in Yemen, to ensure closer integration in particular with routine immunization and delivery of essential health services to children;

REQUEST:

6. The international humanitarian and development communities for their strengthened support for providing essential services, including a robust response to the polio outbreaks in Yemen;

7. All authorities and leaders in Yemen to sustain and strengthen their commitment at all levels to intensify polio eradication efforts, including by continuing to increase access to all children in previously inaccessible areas, implementing area-specific emergency action plans in known under-performing areas and responding to the detection of any new viruses from any source (be it from an acute flaccid paralysis case or environmental sample) as an emergency;

8. All authorities in Yemen to facilitate resumption of house-to-house vaccination campaigns in all areas to ensure delivery of vaccine to the youngest and most vulnerable children who are likely to be missed by delivery of vaccine only through fixed sites. In areas where house-to-house vaccination is not feasible, all efforts should be made to implement intensified fixed site vaccination to ensure high coverage, and,

9. The Regional Director to continue his tremendous leadership and efforts to support the cessation of polio outbreaks in Yemen, including by advocating for all necessary financial and technical support, reviewing progress, plan corrective actions as necessary, and regularly informing Member States of the afore-mentioned and of any eventual further action required, through the World Health Organization Executive Board, World Health Assembly and Regional Committee mechanisms.

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