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

Fifth Meeting of the Regional Subcommittee on Polio Eradication and Outbreaks

14 June 2022

Noting the progress achieved globally in eradicating wild poliovirus transmission since 1988, with virus transmission restricted to just two countries – Afghanistan and Pakistan;



Noting that one case has been reported in Afghanistan and eight in Pakistan since January 2022, and that detection of wild poliovirus cases in both countries so far has been contained within the southern corridor comprising the southeastern part of Afghanistan and southern districts of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province in Pakistan;

Noting that Pakistan completed 15 months without reporting a case of wild poliovirus – the longest period that the country has reported no human cases;

Underscoring that the recent isolation of wild poliovirus from environmental samples in Pakistan and children in Afghanistan confirms continued poliovirus circulation in this joint epidemiological block;

Noting that the populations in this epidemiological bloc remain at high risk from polio due to low rates of routine immunization and supplementary polio vaccinations;

Underscoring the critical need for continued cross-border collaboration to reach children with polio vaccines, and for enhanced polio surveillance to detect the virus;

Noting the timely actions taken by the Prime Minister and Health Minister of Pakistan to respond to the current outbreak of cases in North Waziristan;

Highlighting the sustained commitment by leaders at all levels, notably by political leaders, community and religious leaders, civil society, Global Polio Eradication Initiative partners, especially Rotary International and individual Rotarians and health workers at the forefront in responding to the virus;

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

Appreciating and supporting the decision of the WHO Regional Director for the Easter Mediterranean to formally grade all polio emergencies and apply relevant emergency standard operating procedures to WHO operations to address polio emergencies;

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

DECLARE:

1. The ongoing circulation of wild poliovirus in Afghanistan and Pakistan to be a Regional Public Health Emergency;

COMMIT TO:

2. Mobilizing all necessary engagement and support, by all political, community and civil society

leaders and sectors at all levels, needed to fully resolve the Regional Polio Public Health Emergency;

3. Supporting the coordination of activities across borders to ensure synchronized and cross-border response activities between Afghanistan and Pakistan; and

REQUEST:

4. The international donor and development community to continue supporting the national polio programmes to facilitate implementation of national emergency action plans to end polio in Afghanistan and Pakistan;

5. Sustained and strengthened commitment from all leaders at all levels in Afghanistan and Pakistan, to capitalize on the current epidemiological window of opportunity through intensified eradication efforts, including by continuing to increase access to all children in previously inaccessible areas, implementing area-specific emergency action plans in known underperforming areas and responding to the detection of any new viruses from any source, acute flaccid paralysis case or environmental samples as an emergency;

6. Effective operational delivery by the polio programme to ensure administration of vaccine to the youngest and most vulnerable children who are persistently missed during routine immunization and polio vaccination campaigns, to seize the opportunity to build immunity levels and stop polio transmission;

7. The Regional Director to continue his tremendous leadership and support to Afghanistan and Pakistan in their efforts to eradicate polio, including by advocating for all necessary financial and technical support, coordinating WHO efforts with the wider regional GPEI partnership through the Polio Hub in Amman, reviewing progress, planning corrective actions as necessary, and regularly informing Member States of the aforementioned and of any eventual further action required, through the World Health Organization Executive Board, World Health Assembly and Regional Committee.

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