



WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari (front left) and WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (front right) 9 January 2019, Islamabad – World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has concluded his official visit to Pakistan today, calling for a final push on polio eradication and commitment to ensure that all people in the country can obtain the health care they need.

Addressing a joint press conference here today along with the visiting dignitary, Federal Minister for National Health Regulations and Coordination Aamer Mehmood Kiani said we thank WHO Director-General Dr Tedros for undertaking this visit to Pakistan. We had important deliberations on a wide range of areas of collaboration with a view to uplift the health sector in line with the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan. The Government is undertaking major reforms in the health sector and in this context WHO can work with us to improve health care for our people. I look forward to continuing our strong partnership with WHO and our collective hard work to end polio, which is of the utmost priority to the Government, and to improve general health outcomes in Pakistan,” added the Minister.

During his second official visit to Pakistan from 6 to 8 January 2019, Dr Tedros, accompanied by WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, met with a number of government officials, including Prime Minister Imran Khan, Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Mr Aamer Mehmood Kiani, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reforms Mr Makhdum Khusro Bakhtyar and Federal Minister for Human Rights Dr Shireen Mazari, among other senior officials. Dr Tedros also visited the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) for Polio Eradication, a basic health unit in Shah Allah Ditta, and he accompanied

President of Pakistan Arif Alvi at the launch of the first Pakistan Nursing and Midwifery Summit.

“Speaking with Prime Minister Imran Khan, Dr Tedros appreciated the extraordinary efforts of the Government of Pakistan on polio eradication and affirmed WHO’s full support to reach every child and stop the virus for good. “We have a unique opportunity to achieve eradication. To cross the finish line, we need to focus on what we know works: finding the unvaccinated child, working out why that child has not been reached, and then overcoming that specific challenge,” Dr Tedros said. “Failure to eradicate polio would result in global resurgence of the disease, with as many as 200 000 new cases every year, all over the world.”

WHO Regional Director Dr Al-Mandhari also stated: “I am glad to return back to Pakistan soon after my fruitful visit in December 2018, this time joining WHO's Director-General Dr Tedros for our joint official mission to the country. We are here to reaffirm our continued support for the Government’s transformative public health agenda. 2019 promises to see Pakistan take solid steps towards achieving universal health coverage and eradicating polio.”

Dr Tedros visited a basic health unit in Shah Allah Ditta in Islamabad where a memorandum of understanding was signed between WHO and the Government of Pakistan to develop a model health care system for universal health coverage in Islamabad Capital Territory.

During his visit to the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) for Polio Eradication in Islamabad, Dr Tedros commended the effective work of all partners as ‘one team under one roof’, which helped reduce the number of polio cases in the country from 306 in 2014 to only 8 in 2018. “The key to this progress has been the establishment of the EOCs and the ‘one team’ ethos that expects all government entities and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative partnership to work together under one roof,” Dr Tedros said. “Build on that great achievement and finish the job. Our New Year’s wish is ‘zero’ polio by the end of 2019. The children of Pakistan and the children of the world deserve nothing less.” Dr Tedros also met with key donors and partners and thanked them for their unwavering commitment to polio eradication efforts over the years.

The WHO Director General congratulated the Government of Pakistan on the successful implementation of the nationwide measles campaign in October 2018, which helped vaccinate more than 37 million children against the disease. According to Dr Tedros, sustained investments are needed to strengthen immunization service delivery and to use every opportunity for delivering lifesaving vaccines to children in Pakistan. Strong routine immunization is also critical to keep Pakistan polio-free.

During his meetings with high-level officials, Dr Tedros complimented the Government on a number of new initiatives taken to improve the health system in Pakistan. The Government's plans to provide universal health insurance to all Pakistanis, double the health budget by the end of 2020 and increase it to 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2023 (from the current 0.9% of GDP) are major steps in the right direction to achieve universal health coverage. Dr Tedros also said that WHO would provide all the necessary support to implement the Prime Minister's National Health Programme and to address the critical issue of stunting and malnutrition in Pakistan which is a major barrier to achieving health for all.

A high point of the visit was the inauguration of the first Pakistan Nursing and Midwifery Summit, together with President Dr Arif Alvi. Speaking at the event, Dr Tedros stressed that nurses and midwives are the backbone of every healthcare system. Pakistan faces a critical shortage of health workers including nurses and midwives. More investment is needed to strengthen the supply of human resources for health.

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