From May 19–21, 2024, the State of Qatar hosted the 38th meeting of the WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Commission for Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication (RCC).

The RCC is the regional body that reviews and verifies each country's progress towards maintaining a polio-free status. The annual RCC meeting is an opportunity for all 22 countries and territories of the region to share annual updates and progress reports on the status of their poliovirus surveillance, population immunity, outbreak preparedness and containment of poliovirus in laboratories.

In her address, Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, thanked the State of Qatar for hosting the meeting and acknowledged the work of the National Certification Committees and the National Programmes. "As we approach polio eradication and the subsequent certification of eradication, the quality of surveillance and laboratory performance becomes the central programme priority. WHO will diligently follow the RCC's recommendations as we embark upon the last mile to achieving polio eradication," said Dr

Balkhy.

The RCC acknowledged the epidemiological progress and improvements made in strengthening surveillance and preparedness for poliovirus outbreaks in the region. 18 out of 20 countries within the region have achieved the surveillance standards required for certification of polio eradication. The RCC provisionally accepted reports submitted by 20 polio-free countries in the region, while progress reports of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the two remaining polio-endemic countries, were noted.

Dr Salih Al Marri, Assistant Minister for Health Affairs said, “It is crucial to ensure high quality poliovirus surveillance, and readiness to respond to any poliovirus detections as we approach global polio eradication. Qatar has been polio-free for almost three decades and continues to follow the Regional Certification Commissions standards.”

The RCC also noted the progress made in Afghanistan and Pakistan towards stopping transmission of wild poliovirus. Overall, key recommendations included updating of national surveillance plans and outbreak preparedness and response plans. The Commission also emphasized the urgency to eliminate gaps in poliovirus surveillance sensitivity and population immunity.

The Eastern Mediterranean Region has 12 poliovirus laboratories, and the RCC noted the immense regional co-ordination and collaboration involved in processing and testing poliovirus samples.

In his concluding remarks, Dr Yagoub Al Mazrou, Chair of the RCC said that “Ensuring all countries maintain certification-standard surveillance and high-levels of population immunity is critical at this stage of polio eradication in the region when we are close to interruption of polio in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

With continued political and financial commitment, the region is in a strong position to close outbreaks and eradicate poliovirus in its last few hiding places.

About the Regional Commission for Certification of Poliomyelitis

Eradication

The Eastern Mediterranean Regional Commission for Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication (RCC) was established in 1995 and is chaired by Dr Yagoub Al Mazrou. The objectives of its annual meetings are to review the annual update reports submitted by every country and territory of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, formulate recommendations and to review progress towards certification and containment of laboratory stocks of poliovirus.

The meetings are attended by the members of the RCC, chairpersons of national certification committees that report to the RCC, focal points of the national immunization programmes, and representatives of partner organizations, mainly Rotary International and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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