



**Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN
Geneva**

**National Statement
On the High-level Meeting of the
Global Polio Partners Group (PPG)
(3 December 2018)**

Mr. Chair,

We thank the co-Chairs for convening the meeting. We continue to march towards reaching the ultimate goal of eradication of polio virus from the world. Pakistan's journey to become polio-free has reached many milestones. We have come a long way and won many battles on multiple fronts. Hard work, determination, and resilience have brought us closer to elimination of Polio virus from Pakistan. We are determined in our final push to reach our destination.

Polio eradication is the highest priority of the Government of Pakistan and the incumbent Government is making all possible efforts to eliminate this endemic disease. The country's top leadership including the Honourable President and Prime Minister are personally overseeing the programme. Moreover, the civil society, religious leaders, media and people from all walks of life are playing even greater role towards creating awareness against polio, complementing government's efforts and facilitating polio teams to reach out to each and every child in every nook and corner of the country.

The current polio virus epidemiology in Pakistan remains quite promising providing the best opportunity to stop the poliovirus forever. Since the increase in 2014 reporting 306 Polio cases, the numbers have continued to decline i.e. 54 in 2015, 20 in 2016 and 8 in 2017. In 2018 a total of 8 polio cases have so far been reported from five districts. Being repeatedly vaccinated, five of these cases detected by the highly sensitive surveillance system were successfully protected from residual paralysis.

With only 8 Polio cases recorded in 2018, Pakistan stands closer to its goal of virus interruption. The Government continues to tackle Polio eradication as a national public health emergency. To ensure that the Polio vaccination activities are well organized in close collaboration with provinces, all programme activities are directly overseen by the National, Provincial and Divisional Task Forces. A dynamic network of Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) at the national and provincial levels provides a common platform for joint operations, communications and security planning by 'One Team' led by the Government and amply supported by the partners. The national and provincial leadership is fully engaged in this endeavour implemented at district level by District Polio Eradication Committees under the respective Deputy Commissioners.

During the current National Emergency Action Plan for Polio Eradication (NEAP) (2018-19) period, four national and five sub-national campaigns are planned out of which one national and three sub-national campaigns have been successfully implemented, while the remaining 3 national and 2 sub-national campaigns will be conducted between December 2018 to June 2019. During these campaigns, arrangements are also made to vaccinate children on the move through special transit points established for the purpose. In total, approximately 306 million children under 5 years were vaccinated with Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) across Pakistan during 2017-18 while almost 244 million children will be vaccinated during 2018-19.

Besides this, the combined Oral Polio Vaccine-Inactivated Polio Vaccine (OPV-IPV) campaigns are also implemented in the

strategically selected pockets of the country to boost immunity of the vulnerable children against Poliovirus. Moreover, through the largest environmental surveillance network, the presence of Polio virus is vigilantly monitored at 57 strategically selected sewerage sample collection sites spread across the country.

To ensure that these campaigns achieve the desired level of vaccination coverage, following steps are being undertaken:

- Intense preparations are ensured before each campaign including:
 - Updating and validation of microplans while ensuring inclusion of all the high risk and mobile populations
 - Inclusion of local, female and government accountable members in the Polio teams
 - In-depth review of campaign preparedness by the District and Union Council Polio Eradication Committees at respective level
- Strong coordination with the law enforcement agencies and security forces is maintained to ensure safe working environment for the frontline workers, particularly in the high-risk areas.
- Constant community engagement and social mobilization efforts are undertaken to counter refusals.
- Local influencers and Religious support persons are involved to support Polio workers in areas with clusters of refusing families.
- Tracking and vaccination of the high-risk mobile populations as well as the children reported as missed at the time of team visit.
- Vigilant monitoring at all levels by the programme staff as well as the independent third party monitors during all phases of the campaign.
- Action oriented campaign reviews are conducted every evening as well as after each campaign at all levels and corrective actions are taken in efficient manner.
- Strong coordination with the Afghanistan's Polio program is being maintained for implementation of synchronized campaigns on both sides of the border.

To ensure support and participation of communities, a well strategized communication and social mobilization strategy is being implemented targeting communities'/people perceptions through relevant influential from different society segments. A comprehensive 'Communication for Eradication' strategy is being implemented as part of the current NEAP that uses interactive approaches with focus on listening to the communities and finding ways to address specific issues. As part of this strategy, the local influencers are being mapped and engaged carefully, social analysis of risk factors is conducted and correct messages transmitted to address misconceptions related to vaccine safety and efficacy. Constant community engagement and social mobilization efforts have helped the programme to keep the proportion of refusals below 0.3% of the total targeted children.

We in Pakistan remain mindful of challenges confronting us. The high mobility rates and existence of polio reservoirs across the border are among the major impediment in complete elimination of polio. Strong coordination with the Afghanistan's program is therefore, being maintained for implementation of synchronized campaigns on both sides by pursuing jointly developed Northern and Southern Corridor Action Plans. To further minimize the risk, all children up the age of 10 years are being vaccinated at border crossing points.

With fewer polio cases and more polio campaigns than ever, we are set in to help take the world over the finish line in stopping this disease. Even a single case of polio in the country will be taken seriously and no effort would be spared to ensure complete eradication of the disease from the entire country. It is our shared commitment to continue making efforts towards eliminating the menace of this crippling disease.

Mr. Chair

I wish to convey our sincere appreciation for the efforts of the Global Polio Partners Group. We also acknowledge the support of our partners and agencies for providing technical and financial support to Pakistan Polio Eradication Programme. I am sure that together we can defeat this disease and secure the future of our children from the perils

and the disabilities caused by Polio. I am confident that we will succeed in this noble cause.

I thank you.
