



Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN  
Geneva

**H.E. Tahir Hussain Andrabi, Acting Permanent Representative**

**High-level Meeting of the Global Polio Partners Group (PPG)**

**Friday, 7 June 2019 (09:00-12:30 hrs)**  
**Salle B, WHO Geneva**

**Distinguished Co-Chair,  
Dr. Tedros,**

It is customary to begin every statement in the UN by saying “It is a pleasure to be here”. This meeting is surely an exception for it is not at all a pleasure to be here as a country where polio disease and virus exist. We hope to graduate from this ignominious status sooner rather than latter – a goal we are committed to.

We thank the Co-Chairs for convening the meeting. Pakistan has come a long way in its war against polio and has been able to overcome various challenges through continuous hard work, determination and resilience.

The success we achieved over the past five years, reducing the number of polio cases from 306 in 2014 to 12 in 2018, did not occur overnight. This achievement has been an outcome of several measures that have been taken across the Polio Eradication Programme over the past few years.

It was due to the leadership and commitment of the Government of Pakistan, systematic implementation of campaigns that have helped the programme reach children with essential vaccines before the deadly polio virus was able to reach them.

More importantly, these high-quality campaigns were made possible by the heroic, noble and courageous 260,000 frontline workers, who brave all odds in order to travel from door to door in every street, district and province of Pakistan to guarantee that no child is left unvaccinated and unprotected against this crippling virus.

Operational improvements, such as establishment of Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) both at the national and provincial levels, have assisted the programme and helped garner such results. At the EOCs, partners and government staff work together as “one team under one roof.”

These EOCs continue to be the real powerhouses behind our success, and their work is supported by the best available data, surveillance, operational research, comprehensive real time assessment and monitoring, as well as the guidance and expertise of some of Pakistan’s best epidemiologists and public health experts.

Pakistan programme also continues to work closely with Afghanistan to stop polio virus transmission across shared corridors, and works to halt transmission amongst highly mobile population groups by ensuring synchronization of strategies, tools and activities on both sides of the border.

**Mr. Chair,**

Despite these encouraging results, the poliovirus continues to surface in Pakistan, in particular in three main core reservoir areas including the Khyber-Peshawar block, the Quetta Block, and the Karachi Reservoir and now in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. 19 polio cases were reported and the poliovirus circulation is widespread, as indicated by the results of environmental sampling as 48% samples reported positive for Poliovirus as of 28 May 2019.

Pakistan remains mindful of the challenges that confront us in full eradication of Polio.

The persistent poliovirus circulation in a given area, represents the existence of under-immunized children who miss vaccination during routine immunization and door to door polio campaigns.

In addition, suboptimal routine immunization services, prevalence of malnutrition and challenges associated with the provision of safe water and sanitation are allowing the virus to survive and paralyze vulnerable children with low immunity levels.

Moreover, there are communication challenges, which include low risk perception and concerns around vaccine safety and efficacy, due to anti-vaccine propaganda, spreading mainly on social media. As a result, the polio programme continues facing refusals by missed children during immunization campaigns.

**Mr. Chair,**

The Government and people of Pakistan own the anti-polio campaign. This is our own fight and fight we will. The political zeal to end Polio is there. Prime Minister Imran Khan and his office is engaged with anti-polio campaign on a personal level. During the WHA, our visiting Health Minister briefed DG Tedros and some of you about the initiatives and measures undertaken by the Government. Let me recount a few of these measures.

Pakistan is now implementing the National Emergency Action Plan (NEAP) 2018/19 for Polio Eradication, which includes core strategies for the programme going forward and highlights the critical importance of early detection and response to poliovirus transmission in order to achieve complete eradication. The NEAP includes an intense vaccination campaign schedule focused on operational improvements to achieve high population immunity in the core reservoirs of Quetta, Karachi, and Khyber-Peshawar blocks and other areas with ongoing transmission. The programme has also started development of the next version of NEAP in which the current strategies will be further refined to address the remaining challenges and to achieve the goal of Poliovirus interruption.

To mitigate risks associated with negative anti-vaccine propaganda and to maintain high level of trust in the polio programme, the programme

has comprehensive communication strategies in place including engagement of media, social media and community influencers to address any refusals. The programme is also about to launch, an aggressive perception management campaign to combat any misinformation on the polio vaccine.

The programme is also committed to supporting the provision of integrated package of services for communities in core reservoir areas, or 'polio plus packages', that include basic health services, improved access to healthcare, enhanced routine immunization, and interventions that address sanitation issues and waste management.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all valuable partners and donors. Let's together reach the last mile in eradication of Poliovirus from Pakistan.

I thank you Co-Chair.

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