



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Address by**  
**DR ALA ALWAN**  
**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**  
**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL OFFICE**

**To the**  
**MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON POLIOMYELITIS**  
**ERADICATION IN PAKISTAN**

**Islamabad, Pakistan, 21–22 March 2012**

Mr Chairman, dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Poliomyelitis Eradication in Pakistan. I would like to welcome all members of the Technical Advisory Group and thank them for making time to be with us for these two days. I would like, as well, to express sincere gratitude to the Government of Pakistan for hosting the meeting, and to the delegations, and to acknowledge with appreciation their presence with us despite their other important commitments.

I wish also to take this opportunity to acknowledge the national authorities for their commitment and extensive efforts towards the goal of polio eradication. I also welcome representatives of our close partners, who are with us in this meeting, namely UNICEF, Rotary International, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Atlanta, USAID, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, World Bank, and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Dear Colleagues,

This meeting is taking place at a very critical time for the eradication initiative and with a lot of concern expressed about the continued virus circulation in Pakistan. WHO's Executive Board resolution, declaring the completion of polio eradication a "programmatic emergency for global public health", an emergency approach to polio eradication has been inducted in the Region.

In 2011 there was widespread circulation of poliovirus in Pakistan. 198 polio cases were reported, with the highest number from Baluchistan, Sindh provinces and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). A similar upsurge of polio cases was reported from Afghanistan. In contrast, India has remained without any polio cases for the past year. The spread of the disease in Pakistan clearly indicates that the current level of effort is insufficient to stop all transmission. In addition, wild poliovirus transmission from Sindh province to China was recently found. I have been in the country for the last two days and it has been clearly highlighted during the discussions that sustained and comprehensive action is required from the national authorities to address the situation and to avoid Pakistan being the last country in the world to eradicate polio.

Dear Colleagues,

Implementation has started of the augmented National Emergency Action Plan (NEAP), launched by their Excellencies the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan, together with the Provincial Chief Ministers and Chief Secretaries. The plan specifies clear remedial measures to address the problems. Ownership, oversight and accountability by government functionaries has been introduced through the establishment of task forces, monitoring cells at the national and provincial level, and control rooms in the districts to monitor progress and address constraints. Innovative approaches at the district and Union Council levels could be another step forward to achieve breakthrough, to improve access in the security-compromised areas, and to sustain good coverage in all the accessible areas. Expansion of environmental surveillance to different parts of the country has proved useful in understanding the dynamics of the poliovirus circulation, and in highlighting the importance of vaccinating migrant populations.

We are confident that all these measures, particularly the persistent commitment, oversight and accountability by the Government at all levels, will have the required positive impact on poliovirus circulation in the country.

Dear Colleagues,

Accessible and improved routine EPI services are the key strategy for polio eradication. It is critical that both EPI and polio eradication complement each other. It is essential that the provinces and the federation collaborate and coordinate to achieve the full benefits of the constitutional devolution. There must be clear and comprehensive financial planning, as well

as planning for procurement of vaccines. Every Pakistani child has the right to immunization and must have access to full EPI, among other child health services.

WHO, UNICEF and the various partners in vaccination are fully committed to supporting the federal and provincial governments in this regard.

Dear Colleagues,

The media is a very powerful tool these days in creating and influencing opinion, raising community awareness and creating demand among the population. In February this year, there was setback to the programme because of a negative media campaign. I would like to thank the Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Pediatric Association, Pakistan Medical Association and many other civic societies for extending their full support to the programme and for countering the misinformation that was circulated.

Mr Chairman, Dear Colleagues,

I remain very encouraged by the sustained commitment. I am sure that this commitment, together with your guidance and the full support of partners, will enable the programme to overcome the remaining challenges and to achieve the long-awaited goal of eradication.

In conclusion, let me thank you once more and wish you a successful meeting. We all look forward to your views and recommendations.

I wish you a pleasant stay in Islamabad.