



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

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WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

to the

**NINETEENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR CERTIFICATION
OF POLIOMYELITIS ERADICATION**

Cairo, Egypt, 8–9 October 2008

Mr Chairman, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to the 19th Meeting of the Regional Commission for Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication. I wish specifically to acknowledge the presence of all members of the Commission, representatives of the Regional Commissions of African Region, South-East Asian Region, European Region and the global programme, and representatives of our close partners Rotary International and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, USA.

At your last meeting, held in April this year, we were anticipating being able to report to you now that the situation of poliomyelitis eradication in the two remaining endemic countries in the region—Pakistan and Afghanistan—has continued to improve. Unfortunately, as most of you probably already know, this has not turned out to be the case and this year there has been a resurgence of cases, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Up to the 6th of October 2008, 20 cases (15 P1 and 5 P3) had been reported from Afghanistan and 70 cases (53 P1 and 17 P3) from Pakistan which is about 3 times what was reported for the same period last year. The majority of

cases in Afghanistan are clustered in the south and south-western part of the country, whereas in Pakistan we are seeing cases in areas which have been free of polio for periods as long as two years.

In view of the upsurge of cases in Pakistan, an urgent technical consultation will be held the day after tomorrow to discuss details of the epidemiological situation and recommend actions to address this emergency.

The Region as a whole continues to remain highly vulnerable to importation of wild poliovirus from neighbouring countries in the African region, as was demonstrated by the recent detection of cases in Sudan.

The situation in other countries of the Region remains stable with the quality of AFP surveillance in the Region as a whole remaining well above the certification standard. The in-depth AFP surveillance reviews carried out in the countries of the Gulf Cooperative Council last year revealed some minor weaknesses and served to remind these countries, which have been polio-free for several years, of the need to maintain a high level of capacity for AFP surveillance, especially at the peripheral level of health systems. In order to reinforce this message, training workshops for national and sub-national officers involved in AFP surveillance in countries of the GCC, have been held since your last meeting.

In spite of the temporary setback in our endeavours to interrupt polio transmission in the Region, I personally continue to remain optimistic. My optimism is based on the persistently high-level of political commitment to polio eradication in the Region and to the commitment and devotion of national and international staff involved in polio eradication.

Mr Chairman, I deeply appreciate and am grateful for the commitment of highly placed experts such as yourself and members of your Commission, and others who have steadfastly supported us and provided technical guidance to the programme.

I wish you a very productive meeting and a pleasant stay in Cairo.