



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

**Message from**

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**FOURTEENTH INTERCOUNTRY MEETING OF DIRECTORS OF POLIOVIRUS  
LABORATORIES**

**Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 25–27 October 2010**

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the 14th intercountry meeting of Directors of Poliovirus Laboratories in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. I wish to express our gratitude to the Government of Syrian Arab Republic for agreeing to host the meeting and for the excellent arrangement made in this regard. The presence of the representative of H.E. Dr Rida Saeed, Minister of Health, in this session is a reflection of the priority given by the Government of Syrian Arab Republic to Polio Eradication.

I wish to acknowledge the presence of national responsible officers for polio laboratories in the Region and commend them for the excellent work in the network. I would like to use this occasion to thank the polio partners and collaborators for their continued contribution and commitment towards achieving the goal of polio eradication, I wish also to welcome and thank representatives of the US Centers for Disease Control and prevention, The national Institute for Public Health and Environment of the Netherlands (RIVM), the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, UK, Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) and WHO headquarters.

Dear Colleagues,

Our Region has continued its efforts towards polio eradication despite many challenges. For the past few years there has been continuous wild poliovirus circulation in the two endemic countries of the Region, i.e. Pakistan and Afghanistan. In both Pakistan and Afghanistan, most of the cases are reported in security-compromised area. In Afghanistan, limited access to children both for routine and supplementary immunization in the south is a big challenge. Efforts are in progress to improve the routine OPV immunization and conduct good quality supplementary immunization activities in both endemic countries.

Retrospective testing of Sabin polioviruses using new real-time PCR identified the poliovirus type 2 cVDPV outbreak in Somalia in 2008 and 2009, which is continuing in 2010. The wild poliovirus circulation was interrupted in Sudan and the last case was detected in June 2009.

The Polio Laboratory Network of Eastern Mediterranean Region, as usual, has done an excellent job and I wish to take this opportunity to also thank the KEMRI Laboratory in Kenya for its continued support to the eradication efforts in Somalia and southern Sudan.

Dear Colleagues

We are proud of the competency and efficiency of our polio laboratories network to adapt to new technologies and approaches for the polio eradication initiative. The new polio diagnostic real-time PCR method is fully implemented in key intratypic differentiation (ITD) laboratories. I understand that other new methods and reagents are in the developmental stage for rapid and accurate detection of polioviruses from clinical and environmental samples and will soon be available to implement in the network laboratories.

I am very pleased to know that Tunis Polio Regional Reference Laboratory has been accredited as a WHO poliovirus nucleotide sequencing laboratory. I thank CDC, RIVM and headquarters for helping us to establish this facility in the Tunis laboratory and for maintaining support to the Pakistan Polio Regional Reference Laboratory, which is providing wild poliovirus nucleotide sequencing data to the programme for quick field actions.

The implementation of environmental surveillance in Pakistan is another landmark in the polio eradication initiative, which is helping the Pakistan polio eradication programme to

target the remaining reservoirs in different districts and populations. After its successful implementation in Karachi and Lahore districts, it has been expanded to include other districts of programmatic importance.

Dear Colleagues,

I note that the meeting agenda is quite comprehensive and addresses important laboratory issues, such as quality assurance, molecular epidemiology, environmental surveillance and laboratory biosafety. In the group discussion session on launching of the Biosafety Campaign, each laboratory will participate in all 6 training modules. I welcome this initiative and urge all to implement this in the polio laboratories network and also to replicate the same for other public health laboratories in your country. I look forward to your active participation in this important group discussion.

The polio laboratory network is always considered a model for developing laboratory support for surveillance of other vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and rubella, and lately for the diagnosis of H1N1 infections. I wish to reiterate our encouragement to the network to extend support to other programmes, provided that there is no diversion of resources specified for polio work and that attention is given to maintaining the high standard of performance you have already achieved.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you all for your commitment and for your efforts towards achieving a polio-free world. I wish you a productive meeting and a pleasant stay in Damascus.