



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

to the

**FOURTH COORDINATION MEETING ON PREVENTION OF CROSS-BORDER
TRANSMISSION OF WILD POLIOVIRUS BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC
OF IRAN, IRAQ, SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC AND TURKEY**

Cairo, Egypt, 2–3 February 2000

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this coordination meeting on prevention of cross-border transmission of wild poliovirus. I am very pleased to see among us the national staff responsible for poliomyelitis eradication, and representatives of UNICEF and Rotary International, our partners in the global poliomyelitis eradication initiative. We also welcome WHO staff from the European Regional Office and headquarters.

Dear Colleagues,

I wish to refer to our previous meetings that aimed at coordination of polio eradication activities among the participating countries. In this respect, I have noted with satisfaction the successful implementation of joint cross-border immunization activities which have guarded against importation of wild polioviruses among this group of countries. I am pleased to note that the Syrian Arab Republic has been able to maintain the polio-free status that was achieved in 1996 and that Turkey has had no cases since late 1998. In this regard, I would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate the European Region and the Government of Turkey for now being polio-free for more than one year. I am also pleased to note that transmission of indigenous strains of wild poliovirus appears to have been interrupted in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Epidemiological investigation of the 3 polio cases reported during 1999 and genomic analysis of viral isolates from these cases points to the fact that wild poliovirus-associated cases were linked to reintroduction of wild polioviruses from Afghanistan.

The situation with regard to poliovirus circulation in Iraq is a cause of great concern. The outbreak that occurred during 1999, with 95 polio cases and 32 wild poliovirus isolates, is a real setback from 1998 when no poliovirus was isolated. I wish however to acknowledge the response of the Government of Iraq and the support extended by its main partners, WHO and UNICEF, and the intensive accelerated activities aimed at stopping transmission. The threat posed by this situation for neighbouring countries should not be underestimated. It calls for high-quality coordinated supplementary immunization campaigns in adjoining border provinces, particularly as there are many challenges in these areas such as frequent population movement, difficult terrain and poor access to health services. I trust that efforts to ensure successful high-quality campaigns will include advanced preparation, good microplanning that addresses local challenges, extensive supervision, house-to-house vaccination and effective community mobilization. Furthermore, I am confident that the ongoing intensive accelerated activities in Iraq to stop transmission will continue and that transmission will stop before the end of 2000.

Dear Colleagues,

The year 1999 witnessed continued improvement in acute flaccid paralysis surveillance in all the participating countries. However, I would like to emphasize the need to ensure high-quality surveillance, particularly in all border provinces and districts. In addition, the mopping-up immunization activities are an opportunity to include active searches for AFP and polio cases.

Also, polio-free countries at risk of importation should prepare a plan indicating preparedness to detect and deal in a timely manner with any importation. The core of such a plan is a sensitive surveillance system, which will enable early detection and containment of such cases.

Dear Colleagues,

The achievements of participating countries towards reaching the poliomyelitis eradication goal are very significant but the job has not finished yet. I am confident that in your deliberations you will critically review the individual country situations and make the necessary recommendations concerning the joint efforts required to maintain polio-free status and to interrupt any wild poliovirus transmission in this area.

The firm commitment of the countries represented at this meeting to continuing coordinated poliomyelitis eradication activities is crucial. I am happy to note that you will finalize the plans developed for the coordinated mopping-up immunization and surveillance in border areas in 2000.

In conclusion, I wish to thank you all individually for your efforts. I also wish to thank the international agencies present at the meeting for their continued support and contribution to national and regional poliomyelitis eradication efforts.

I wish you all success in your deliberations and a pleasant stay in Cairo.