



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

**Message from**

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**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**FIFTH OF THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON POLIOMYELITIS**

**ERADICATION FOR PAKISTAN**

**Islamabad, Pakistan, 15–16 May 2003**

Dear Colleagues, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Fifth Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Poliomyelitis Eradication for Pakistan. I would like to express my gratitude to the TAG members for their continued participation and guidance in the fight to eradicate poliomyelitis from Pakistan and the Region as a whole. I would also like to commend the Federal Ministry of Health in Pakistan, as well as the many poliomyelitis eradication partners in Pakistan for their great commitment and effort towards the eradication goal.

Dear Colleagues,

We continue to witness great achievements towards the goal of polio eradication in the Region. During 2002, only 4 of the 23 countries of the Region reported ongoing polio transmission. Three of these countries, Afghanistan, Egypt and Somalia experienced low level transmission of poliovirus, and interruption of transmission is at hand. Pakistan, the fourth country reporting polio transmission in 2002, is making tremendous progress towards polio eradication. Surveillance has been maintained at certification standard level and multiple rounds of supplementary immunization activities have been conducted. Poliovirus transmission has been reduced in important areas, such as Quetta, Karachi and Lahore, which in the past have experienced intense polio transmission.

Three weeks ago, I had the pleasure of visiting Pakistan with Mr Sadiq Rasheed, UNICEF Regional Director for South Asia. We held very productive discussions with H.E. Mr Mohammad Nasir Khan, Federal Minister of Health, and senior officials. I also travelled to Punjab, Sindh and North West Frontier provinces to witness programme implementation in the field. We were very impressed by the dedication and commitment of nationals at all levels. The frank discussions helped us better understand the current situation, and we remain committed to supporting national efforts to ensure that no child in Pakistan is ever again crippled by polio.

However, while the national polio eradication programme has entered the final stretch along the road towards polio eradication, as with a marathon, the final stretch can be the most difficult. Nevertheless, based on my observations in the field, I am convinced that the national programme will succeed. Please bear in mind that your efforts will benefit children in Pakistan not just today, but in perpetuity. I commend you for your commitment and your work.

Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge the polio partners to the polio eradication programme in Pakistan. UNICEF, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Rotary International and WHO have all supported the programme since its initiation, providing necessary technical and financial support, and continue to do so. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has recently provided a generous donation to support the upcoming sub-national immunization days, while the Government of Japan and the new

partnership of the World Bank, Rotary International, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and United Nations Foundation are providing the necessary resources to purchase the oral poliovaccine. Other key partners, particularly the UK Department for International Development and USAID, are also providing significant support. I am confident that all the partners will continue their commitment and support which are basic to achieving the goal.

I wish to close by thanking members of the TAG for their commitment and for taking the time from their busy schedules to attend this meeting. I look forward to TAG's views and recommendations on how to help the programme succeed in interrupting wild poliovirus transmission and in sustaining high quality surveillance.

It only remains for me to wish you a successful meeting and enjoyable stay in Islamabad.