

H.E. Director General Tedros

Health Ministers

Representatives

Dear Excellency, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

This year is unique and we all are going through unprecedented situation of a deadly pandemic which has changed the way we live, and is the biggest threat of this century to the health and wellbeing of our people. Afghanistan has shared the misery; in a short period more than 300,000 Afghans returned to the country from heavily infected areas which caused a massive spread of the disease. The pandemic thoughts us that our health is interconnected, and the fact that health equity is an urgent call more than ever.

We believe that the new tools (vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics) should be equitably shared with all countries. Health professionals and elderly people should be at the top of the agenda for vaccination.

Afghanistan remains committed to update the National Influenza Pandemic Plan and strengthen the influenza surveillance system. Currently we have nine SARI ILI surveillance in major and main cities in the country, the system collects and tests about 3000 influenza suspected cases annually. We expect WHO to maintain the support the influenza surveillance activities including the National Influenza Center (NIC) in Afghanistan for upcoming years.

Dear Colleagues

Despite concerted efforts towards polio eradication, Afghanistan continue to remain one of the last two polio endemic countries in the world. Main challenges to the polio program are the 1) inaccessibility for polio campaign missing around 2 million kids

Pillar 2

(20% of the national target), **2)** refusal families in some accessible compromised areas, **3)** presence of high-risk mobile population and **4)** very low routine immunization coverage in polio endemic provinces and **5)** low quality program implementation to some extent.

The polio situation further become challenged following the house to house polio campaign ban imposed by Anti-Government Elements (AGEs-Taliban) since the past 29 months and around two million children remained missed.

So far, 53 confirmed polio cases have been reported in 2020 of which around 90% of the cases are in southern provinces and 80% happened in inaccessible areas under control of Taliban where polio campaigns are banned.

Polio Eradication is the top agenda for MoPH, but two drops of Polio vaccine is not enough anymore. MoPH with the support of Afghanistan Islamic Government and international partners is addressing influencing social factors such as provision of clean water, health education, sanitation, access to basic health services in the Polio endemic areas.

Excellencies!

Afghanistan endorsed the IHR in 2009. We know that developing IHR core capacities are vital especially in Afghanistan which is still among endemic countries for Polio and at risk of emergence of novel diseases. The importance of readiness and preparedness capacities have been realized during COVID-19 response. The COVID-19 crisis has been an opportunity for developing IHR core capacities including coordination and reporting, surveillance, lab, Point of Entry (PoE), linking with security authorities, and emergency response. During COVID-19 response, important measures have been taken in different parts.

Pillar 2

I am sure collectively we will be able to mount the most effective response to the different challenges we are facing in the current situation and reach our goal. Afghanistan as a fragile and low income country will count on your continued support during these difficult times.

Thank you