

RESUMED SESSION OF THE SEVENTY-THIRD WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Agenda Item 11.3 Global vaccine action plan

The Global Vaccine Action Plan (2011-2020) will come to an end at the end of this year. The report by the Director General of the World Health Assembly outlined the progress and challenges made during the past decade. He highlighted the fact that most of the global and regional immunization goals set out in the action plan will not be achieved by 2020 which will result in one in five children not being able to access life-saving vaccines recommended by the WHO. There is a need for countries to ensure vaccination coverage increases evenly among and within countries, since the risk of virus importation and outbreaks remain a risk to all countries.

The Ministry of Health, Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT), embraced the overall objective of the Global Vaccine Action Plan (2011-2020) on strengthening global immunisation efforts to leave no one behind. It remains steadfast in its commitment to making immunisation a priority. To that end the government has put forward national legislation, policies and invested resources to ensure that the National Immunization Programme is fully integrated into primary healthcare. We welcome the global immunisation strategy, “Global Immunization Agenda 2030” that positions immunisation within the wider context of primary healthcare and as a key intervention for achieving universal health coverage.

In that context, Trinidad and Tobago (TTO) has met the following targets and objectives to date:

- **Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan 2020 [PEESP]**

In fulfilling the requirements of the Polio Eradication Endgame Strategic Plan, Trinidad and Tobago participated in the switch from trivalent OPV (tOPV) to the bivalent oral polio vaccine (bOPV), including the introduction of a primary dose of Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV) into the national immunisation schedule to children at 2 months of age in December of 2015. In 2020, a second dose of IPV has been introduced at four (4) months of age.

- **Measles, Rubella and CRS Elimination**

In 2015, TTO and the Region of the Americas were certified rubella free and in 2016 certified measles free. We continue to work to maintain our measles and rubella free status despite challenges faced with a growing migrant population.

- **Introduction of Human Papilloma Vaccine**

TTO has successfully introduced the HPV vaccine into our national immunisation programme.

- **Meningitis prevention and control**

TTO's National Immunisation Programme offers vaccines against bacterial meningitis (meningococcus, pneumococcus, *Haemophilus influenzae* and group B streptococcus) across the lifespan. Immunisation and disease surveillance are recognised as being critical for preventing, detecting and controlling outbreaks of infectious diseases. The surveillance data is used to monitor the efficacy of the immunisation programme.

- **COVID-19**

The GoRTT, by Cabinet Minute No. 184 (2nd Session) agreed to sign the final individualised Commitment Agreement with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to join the COVAX Facility under the Committed Purchase Model, subject to positive vetting by the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. Trinidad and Tobago has requested vaccines to cover 33% of its population in the first instance.

The COVAX Facility is a mechanism through which demand and resources are pooled to support availability of, and equitable access to, COVID-19 vaccines for all economies. The aim of the COVAX Facility is to provide the world with the best chance that safe, efficacious COVID-19 vaccines are rapidly available and affordable - to the highest risk populations worldwide, regardless of income level. The Facility aims to provide at least 2 billion doses by the end of 2021, enabling participating countries to protect frontline health care and social workers, as well as other high-risk groups as identified by the World Health Organization.

COVAX is the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and is co-led by Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the WHO. Under COVAX, the three (3) organisations work together to fund development and manufacturing activities, to finance the procurement and to deploy COVID-19 vaccines in a fair and equitable manner. Gavi, which is a public-private health partnership with the goal of increasing access to immunisation in poor countries, coordinates the COVAX Facility which is the funding mechanism for procurement.

Apart from the mentioned, the GoRTT is in the process of reviewing a proposal submitted by the People's Republic of China for the provision and procurement of vaccines against the COVID-19 virus. The Ministry of Health continues to be vigilant and cautious in its fight against COVID-19.

Way Forward

TTO, as a Member State of the WHO, is committed to achieving the goals and strategic objectives of the Global Immunization Agenda 2030 by adopting the decision EB146(7), on strengthening global immunization efforts to leave no-one behind. Trinidad and Tobago continues to focus on strengthening immunization and surveillance while striving towards attaining universal health coverage at the national and district levels. The Ministry of Health is committed to providing access to safe, effective and quality vaccines throughout the lifespan in an efficient immunization programme that allows for equity in distribution of vaccines to the people of this country. As such the National Immunization Programme is fully integrated into Primary Health Care. Our aim is to achieve 95% coverage for all antigens. This goal is being realized by ensuring equitable distribution of all vaccines and easy access to the same across one hundred and nine (109) local public health facilities as well as in the private health facilities. While this goal is sometimes hampered by occasional stock outs, the Government is committed to sustainability of the National Immunization Programme by focusing on the following key areas:

- Strengthening surveillance systems
- Improving immunization coverage
- Building national capacity
- Improving the response to imported cases
- Improving the response to outbreak management

There is clearly a need for countries to develop strong national operational capacity to maintain a robust immunization system to which we remain committed.