

## Press Release

**Embargoed: 09.30 BST, June 20, 2012**

### **Global polio eradication ‘at tipping point’; report calls for urgent action to reverse funding cuts and build on impressive recent gains**

- *Ten years after Europe declared polio-free, new report outlines steps to achieve global eradication goal*

**London** – Ten years after Europe was declared polio-free, a new report is calling for urgent global action to build on recent progress against the disease, which will otherwise be put at risk by a US\$945 million funding gap.

The report, [Every Missed Child](#), is the latest quarterly assessment of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). It says there is currently a unique window of opportunity to stamp out polio for good, with global cases of the disease at their lowest levels since records began, and limited to fewer districts, within fewer countries than ever before.

“The world has the opportunity to end polio for good, but it will not happen if the programme remains so desperately under-financed” said Sir Liam Donaldson, Chair of the Independent Monitoring Board.

The GPEI’s funding gap of almost US\$1bn, out of a total 2012-13 programme budget of US\$2bn, means vaccination campaigns for 2012 will have been cancelled in 33 countries, leaving 94 million children under-immunised. In a letter to the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Sir Liam wrote: “This is an extreme and unacceptable risk. It could set this global endeavour back by many years, and vastly increase the eventual cost of achieving eradication.”

The new IMB report focuses on the need to reach the children who are repeatedly being missed by polio vaccinators. In the six countries where polio persists, there are 2.7 million children who have never received even a single dose of polio vaccine.

“These are the children that the world forgot, growing up with no protection from polio at a time when most of the world’s parents have long-forgotten what polio even is,” said Sir Liam.

According to the IMB report, the polio virus is now taking refuge in a number of “sanctuaries”, specific areas of the six affected countries where the virus can multiply and prepare for a fresh attack on the vulnerable. These sanctuaries exist because too many children in them are being missed.

As an example of what can be done, the report singles out the impressive success in India, which, despite being long-regarded as the most difficult place to eradicate polio, was declared polio-free in 2012.

“India’s achievement is nothing short of momentous, and should greatly enhance confidence that polio can be eradicated worldwide,” said Sir Liam.

Of the six countries where polio persists, the report found:

- Pakistan has shown significant progress so far this year, with half as many cases as in the same period in 2011
- Chad has made progress also with only three cases this year and a new effort to reach vulnerable nomadic communities
- Neither Angola nor the Democratic Republic of Congo have recorded a single polio case in 2012
- Nigeria is a continued cause for concern with large numbers of children being missed in the northern states. Ongoing circulation of polio virus in Nigeria is putting millions at risk in neighbouring countries.
- Afghanistan is “on the critical list” with insecurity compounding deeper systemic problems with the programme

Just weeks after polio was declared a global health emergency at the 65<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly, the IMB said it hoped the resolution passed would rally countries behind polio eradication as a common cause and ‘global public good’. It also said that the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has a great potential legacy that could extend far beyond polio .

“Ending polio is a crucial goal in its own right, but would also lay the foundations for further major global health developments to protect children in the poorest and most inaccessible places”, Sir Liam Donaldson said.

The IMB report, Every Missed Child, is available here:

[http://www.polioeradication.org/Portals/0/Document/Aboutus/Governance/IMB/6IMBMeeting/IMB6\\_Report.pdf](http://www.polioeradication.org/Portals/0/Document/Aboutus/Governance/IMB/6IMBMeeting/IMB6_Report.pdf)

###

### **Notes to Editors:**

**Polio** is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus. It invades the nervous system and can cause irreversible paralysis in a matter of hours. There is no cure, but there are safe and effective vaccines. The strategy to eradicate polio is therefore based on preventing infection by immunising every child until transmission stops and the world is polio-free. Polio can strike at any age, but mainly affects children under five years old. For more detail see : [www.polioeradication.org/Polioandprevention.aspx](http://www.polioeradication.org/Polioandprevention.aspx)

**The Global Polio Eradication Initiative** (<http://www.polioeradication.org/>) is an international partnership led by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, Rotary International, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in partnership with governments and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The **Independent Monitoring Board** (IMB) was convened in November 2010 at the request of the World Health Assembly to monitor and guide the progress of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative’s 2010-2012 Strategic Plan. The IMB releases quarterly reports to

provide an honest and transparent external assessment of the progress being made towards polio eradication.

The IMB is chaired by Sir Liam Donaldson, England's former Chief Medical Officer. Its other members are:

- Professor Michael Toole, Head, Centre for International Health, Burnet Institute, Melbourne
- Dr Nasr El Sayed, Assistant Minister of Health, Egypt
- Dr Ciro de Quadros, Executive Vice President, Sabin Vaccine Institute
- Dr Jeffrey Koplan, Vice President for Global Health, Director, Emory Global Health Institute
- Dr Sigrun Mogedal, Special Advisor, Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services
- Professor Ruth Nduati, Chairperson, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, University of Nairobi
- Dr Arvind Singhal, Marston Endowed Professor of Communication, University of Texas at El Paso

**For more information, contact Paul Rutter, Independent Monitoring Board Secretariat, +44 (0) 7729 971742, [imb-prutter@polioeradication.org](mailto:imb-prutter@polioeradication.org)**