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Last month, the world joined in celebration as India – once considered the hardest place on earth to end polio – marked three years without a case of wild poliovirus. India's milestone comes after a year of progress cornering the virus in the last few countries where polio remains endemic.

Yet serious challenges remain. In Pakistan, immunization campaigns have again been interrupted by violence and polio case counts have risen. A coordinated response is ongoing in the Middle East, where new cases continue to emerge; in the Horn of Africa, the response has entered its second phase, with a substantial decline in cases.

The World Health Organization's Executive Board met in Geneva last month to discuss progress against the Strategic Plan to end polio by 2018, priorities for 2014, and growing concerns over the risk of major outbreaks in polio-free countries. Member States requested the WHO Director-General to convene experts to advise on the public health benefits of global vaccination requirements for travellers from polio-infected areas.

India: 3 years polio-free

India's success eliminating polio is a result of remarkable commitment at all levels – from the highest reaches of government to the heroic 2.3 million vaccinators delivering polio drops. This landmark sets the stage for the entire South East Asian Region's official polio-free certification at the end of March.

Now, lessons from India's polio program are helping the remaining endemic countries

root out the virus. In addition, the infrastructure and innovations that helped India reach large numbers of children with polio vaccines are being used to control measles and strengthen routine immunization. [More](#)

St. Stephen's Hospital in Delhi has the distinction of being India's last-ever polio ward. Watch the incredible [video](#) here.

WPV case numbers for 2014

Global total: 18 (2) ↑
 Global WPV1: 18 (2) ↑
 Global WPV3: 0 (0)
 Endemic: 18 (2) ↑
 Importation: 0 (0)
 # of infected countries: 2 (1) ↑
 # infected districts: 7 (2) ↑

As of 19 February 2014. Numbers in brackets represent data this time in 2013.

[Current case map](#)

Making progress

- In 2013, Afghanistan restricted polio cases primarily to one region (the eastern border with Pakistan). Also in 2013, Nigeria reduced polio case counts by 57%.

Causing concern

- Polio cases in Pakistan increased 60% last year, to 93 in 2013 from 58 in 2012. Approximately 80% of 2013 cases were concentrated in the northwest, including North Waziristan, where local leaders have suspended immunization activities since June 2012.



Rotary clubs illuminated landmarks and iconic structures across India with polio-free messages in celebration of the country's anniversary on 13 January. © Rotary

Middle East outbreak response

The largest-ever coordinated immunization effort in the Middle East is underway to stop an outbreak of polio in Syria. While many children remain inaccessible to health workers, particularly those in ongoing conflict areas, the most recent round of vaccinations suggest that coverage was [greater than 85%](#) in all but three of Syria's

governorates. Senior UN officials joined international aid organizations in signing an [open letter](#) that calls on all parties to the Syrian conflict to allow polio vaccines and other humanitarian aid to reach children. [More](#)

Spotlight: Ashok Mahajan's 20 years fighting polio in India

For more than 20 years, Rotary member Ashok Mahajan has been part of the fight to end polio in India, working with religious leaders in minority communities to improve acceptance of polio vaccines. "From the early

years of India reporting polio cases every day to no cases of polio in the last three years, we have come a long way," Mahajan says. Read the rest of his story [here](#).

Technical toolbox: Planning polio's legacy

In the fight against polio, vaccinators have reached communities well beyond the reach of central health systems. In fact, polio-funded personnel are the only health workers some individuals have ever seen.

and systems put in place to end polio can be used for other health priorities long after eradication. To achieve this, an extensive consultation process is beginning, with input sought from the global, regional and country levels. [More](#)

A key component of the Strategic Plan involves preparing for how the infrastructure



Mainstreaming polio efforts into national and international immunization programs will fortify health systems and enable disease detection and response globally. © UNICEF/ Asad Zaidi

Funding and donors

- The Lawrence Ellison Foundation announced a gift of US\$ 100 million over 5 years, with roughly US\$ 20 million already delivered in 2013, to support polio eradication. [More](#)
- Japan pledged US\$ 12 million over the next year to support efforts to eradicate polio and strengthen routine immunization in Afghanistan.
- In response to Syria's outbreak, the Governments of [Estonia](#) and [Germany](#) have contributed nearly €900,000 and €4.1 million, respectively, to support vaccination campaigns. Additional funds have also been provided by the Government of Austria and the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO).

