
CHAIRS' STATEMENT
High Level Meeting of the Global Polio Partners Group (PPG)
Monday, 08 December 2014

On 8 December 2014, the semi-annual high-level meeting of the Polio Partners Group of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) was convened in Geneva at the World Health Organization. Approximately 65 representatives from governments (including 11 Ambassadors and others from a large number of permanent missions to the United Nations), international organizations, non-governmental organizations, foundations, core GPEI partners and other key stakeholders participated in the discussion. Also present was Dr Margaret Chan (WHO Director General), Dr. Seth Berkley (GAVI Vaccine Alliance CEO), and Dr Chris Elias (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Global Development President and current chair of the Polio Oversight Board), who joined remotely from Seattle.

In keeping with PPG practice of having high level speakers with whom partners can engage, UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake attended as the featured speaker. Dr. Lake spoke to the significant progress achieved to date in polio eradication efforts, and to the imperative of maintaining the current momentum. He highlighted the positive direct and collateral benefits to global public health brought about by the polio program, such as in improving local outreach, engagement and monitoring (which was key in helping arrest Ebola in Nigeria); the use of innovative technologies; and the demonstrated ability to ensure equity in health interventions by reaching even the most disadvantaged, hard to reach children. Mr. Lake noted the program had been daring and audacious in its goal setting – a trait that has not only served it well in showing a polio-free world is achievable, but has a demonstration effect for other complex global challenges.

In assessing developments over the course of 2014, PPG stakeholders were buoyed by important steps taken to grapple with outbreaks in the Middle East, the potential for a polio-free Africa due to critical progress in Nigeria, and the fact that no wild poliovirus type three (WPV3) has been detected in more than two years – perhaps signalling that global WPV3 transmission may have been interrupted. However, stakeholders were cautious, equally mindful that the important challenges remaining -- notably, the threats faced by health workers in some countries; the risks posed by importation of polio from affected countries that have generated the declaration of polio as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern; the increase in cases in Pakistan; and the need to fully fund the Eradication and Endgame Strategy through 2018 -- have serious implications for global polio eradication efforts.

Nevertheless, stakeholders re-affirmed their commitment to support the Eradication and Endgame strategy for achieving polio eradication. During the meeting, participants reviewed trends in late 2014 and expectations for progress in 2015, including the impact of Ebola on the polio program; the tOPV to bOPV switch and plans to introduce the Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV); efforts to further strengthen polio and routine immunization integration and Legacy

planning; and the outcomes of the PwC management and oversight review that was commissioned by the Polio Oversight Board. Participants also agreed on a process for selecting a replacement co-chair for the co-chair from Canada, who will transition in 2015, and subsequently the co-chair from the UN Foundation, who will transition in 2016.

During the high level meeting, PPG stakeholders:

- Noted the need for continued vigilance by States and GPEI partners as the Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan continues to be implemented, and emphasized the importance of GPEI pursuing necessary course corrections to address any shortcomings.
- Underscored the importance of strengthened surveillance systems, outbreak preparedness, and response capacity for polio and other health emergencies, including through community health systems strengthening. The PPG supported, in this regard, the proposed emphasis on encouraging synergies and using lessons learned related to surveillance done for Ebola, polio and routine vaccination, and the importance of mitigating any loss of confidence in immunization programs that may arise from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.
- Commended the commitment of the millions of volunteers and health personnel participating in polio campaigns around the world, noting that insecurity remains a major concern in some areas.
- Acknowledged the progress made in the Middle East to address recent outbreaks. PPG stakeholders noted the positive evolution in Nigeria and the prospect of a polio free Africa if positive momentum can be sustained, including during Nigeria's upcoming elections period. In the context of Legacy planning, the PPG took positive note of the key role played by the polio program in mitigating the spread of Ebola cases in Nigeria – a practical example of effectively utilizing polio program investments (“the Legacy in action”).
- Took note of recent efforts by the Government of Pakistan to develop a low season plan and appreciated the support for its implementation that exists at the most senior levels of government, but expressed concern that among the endemic countries, Pakistan has had a substantial increase in cases in 2014 and remains a critical vector for polio transmission internationally. PPG stakeholders expressed their desire to see pro-active steps taken to improve access to children in hard to reach areas, to ensure accountability for attacks against health workers, and to increase effective program oversight.
- Recognized the importance of high level political ownership and engagement on polio eradication, and more broadly, the value of diplomatic engagement, including from PPG stakeholders, in fostering political commitment to polio eradication in countries identified as most at risk (the “Red List” countries), including Ukraine.

- Expressed appreciation for the PPG Legacy Planning Workshop held in Geneva on 20 October 2014, and the update on the 10 focus countries where strengthened work is underway to enhance routine immunization. Stakeholders called on GPEI to ensure that PPG members remain engaged in the development of the Global Legacy Framework – including through an update at the spring 2015 PPG high level meeting. They underscored the importance of capturing strong evidence on lessons learned (from past practice and in real time such as in relation to Ebola), to inform future global health initiatives and to enhance the GPEI narrative explaining how the significant investments made towards polio eradication have also contributed towards broader global health interventions.
- Stressed the need for GPEI and GAVI Alliance partners to continue their collaboration and their joint efforts to reinforce the relationship between polio and routine immunization activities, noted the benefits of this in relation to IPV introduction and social mobilization campaigns, and recognized the importance of IPV introduction in countries that are not GAVI eligible.
- Took note of progress on planning for IPV introduction and the need to be attentive to any outstanding challenges, including programmatic, financing and supply issues.
- Considered the draft of the management and oversight review of the polio program commissioned by the POB, which is focused on reorienting rather than restructuring GPEI, and welcomed the opportunity to provide comments through the PPG co-chairs and/or directly to the POB chair. PPG members asked to be updated by the POB at the spring 2015 PPG high level meeting on the progress made by the POB to enhance the GPEI's management effectiveness and whether the triggers to initiate further steps as outlined in the PwC review were/would be necessary. Stakeholders agreed that the PPG remains a valued platform for oversight, advocacy and information. Consistent with the PwC review, the PPG co-chairs were asked to work with the POB chair to assess the PPG TORs, consultative process and meeting cadence to ensure effective alignment with modifications to the POB's work and to ensure the PPG continues to fulfil stakeholder requirements. In the interim, PPG members recalled their desire to be provided with documentation further in advance of POB meetings and a clear sense of the issues on which the POB seeks the PPG's views, in order to provide strategic comments through the PPG co-chairs.

The PPG asked the two co-chairs to send the PPG Chairs' Statement to the GPEI Polio Oversight Board, the Polio Steering Committee, and the Independent Monitoring Board for their consideration and action as appropriate and asked the co-chairs to represent their views at the 12 December 2014 meeting of the POB.