

To: H.E. Ms. Leslie NORTON  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in  
Geneva  
Avenue de l'Ariana 5  
1202 Geneva

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the Polio Oversight Board (POB), I thank you and your colleagues from the United Kingdom, USAID, Germany, and Australia for your engagement, both in the last POB meeting in December 2020 and throughout a difficult year. The POB has considered the statement made at the last Board and I would like to share our response.

As you are aware, GPEI will be finalizing by March 2021 three interlinked processes in which many of you have been engaged: reviews of governance, management, and overall strategy. As many of the points of concern raised in your statement are being addressed through these processes, I would like to share with you some key milestones in the first half of 2021 and give specific feedback on some of the points raised in the statement.

The revised strategy is tabled for discussion and endorsement by the POB at an open meeting in March 2021. As is customary for open meetings of the POB, all major donors to GPEI are welcome to attend that meeting. This will follow GPEI consultations with donors and polio affected national governments, and the sharing of the draft strategy for comment by all stakeholders in March. In parallel the governance review recommendations are being implemented, including a comprehensive external management review which is considering governance and decision making at all levels of the partnership.

POB meetings will have a bi-monthly cadence in 2021, with meetings focused on strategic decisions and POB actions to fully implement the new strategy and engage key stakeholders. An indicative calendar is attached for reference. Pending the completion of the strategy, GPEI has moved forward on the urgent issues raised in your statement:

**Integration:** GPEI continues to address integration in collaboration with countries and the specific context. GPEI is reviewing a plan developed for southern Afghanistan which focuses on ensuring that polio vaccination is maximized through all possible channels, including the Government of Afghanistan's Sehatmandi programme, as part of an integrated package of services. In Pakistan, GPEI continues to advocate for funding of integrated services in communities with high-risk of transmission. Wherever polio resources are available, the polio network continues to provide critical support to protect communities from COVID-19, and wherever logistically and epidemiologically feasible, GPEI aims to hold multi-antigen campaigns, creating efficiencies with measles programmes and other appropriate interventions. Following the joint call to action for measles and polio

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outbreaks and in line with the Polio Eradication and Essential Programme on Immunization Interim Programme of Work for Integrated Actions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (iPOW), exploring possibilities for combined action is standard in planning immunization campaigns.

**Independent Monitoring Board (IMB):** Recommendations of the 19<sup>th</sup> IMB report are under discussion and consideration as part of the strategy development process. Specifically, those related to Pakistan and Afghanistan-specific challenges; integration; outbreak response; and greater engagement of national governments. GPEI has developed an implementation plan with timelines for each recommendation and will share an interim progress update by the end of March 2021. This will be followed by a final report on the status of implementation in advance of the next IMB meeting.

**Governance.** At our February meeting, the POB will review and provide guidance on GPEI governance structures. More information will be shared prior to the open POB meeting in March 2021.

**Risk management.** GPEI is working to ensure a common understanding and consensus on our approach to risk management. We appreciate the guidance provided by the risk management experts from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office who have met with GPEI staff to advise on content and format, building on both WHO and UNICEF corporate risk management systems as well as specific risks to polio eradication. We would also like to acknowledge the offer of expertise from Global Affairs Canada to further strengthen the approach. Our new risk management approach will be implemented starting in Q2 of this year and will be complemented by a strong results framework based on the strategy.

In the current economic climate, the POB is aware of the need for both intensifying and diversifying **resource mobilization**. GPEI has already restructured its resource mobilization function to better pursue non-traditional funding sources, including innovative financing and domestic financing. In November, UNICEF and WHO issued a joint Call to Action for outbreak response support from domestic resources to polio and measles outbreaks and the prioritization of funding immunization in national budgets. This effort is beginning to bear fruit with the recent financial commitments of Sudan and the Philippines to respond to outbreaks in those countries. We would very much welcome support from donors in determining how this work stream is shaped.

Current donors continue to play an important role in financing the GPEI, including through the operationalisation of the generous pledges made in Abu Dhabi in 2019. The POB is especially grateful to those donors who have already monetized their pledges in 2020 despite the challenges and encourages others to follow suit.

Ambassador, on behalf of the POB I would like to thank you and the donor community for your longstanding financial commitment and active engagement in finding solutions to the challenges the GPEI faces at this moment.

I look forward to further dialogue as we work together to achieve a polio-free world.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Elias, Chair of the Polio Oversight Board, Global Polio Eradication Initiative,  
On behalf of the Polio Oversight Board

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