

Dear Colleagues:

I thank the Polio Oversight Board (POB) for asking me to be their chair starting this month for the next two years, and Dr. Chris Elias, for his vision and leadership as the first POB chair. Under Chris' chairmanship, the POB made substantial progress defining the role of the Board, strengthening relationships with partners, and, most importantly, advancing polio eradication, particularly the important progress in Africa.

One of Chris's achievements in the organizational realm was the commissioning of a review of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative's organization. This review highlighted the need for more transparency and more accountability. I thank Chris for agreeing to chair the newly formed Finance and Accountability Committee of the POB, which will provide for clearer information on the financial status of the Initiative.

Supporting Pakistan to make much faster progress against polio is the Initiative's top priority for 2015. Last year, Pakistan accounted for 85% of all polio in the world (Figure). In recent years, Afghanistan, China, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Syria, and Iraq have all battled polio virus emanating from Pakistan.

The Pakistani polio program made real progress in 2011 and 2012, bringing the country to the brink of polio elimination; progress was interrupted by violence against health workers. Since this time, despite obstacles, the program has had some successes, such as the vaccination of children in and around Peshawar on twelve consecutive Sundays last year without incident.

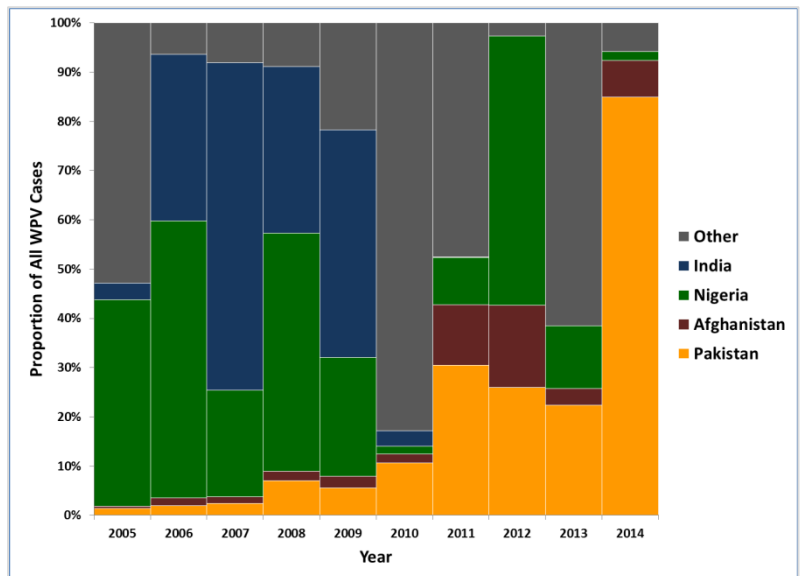


Figure: Pakistan was responsible for nearly 90% of wild poliovirus circulating in 2014. [Wild poliovirus cases—proportion by country and year.]

The national and provincial governments of Pakistan engaged partners in an ambitious plan, finalized in November 2014 in Bhurban, to make progress toward eradication. This plan envisages an aggressive Supplemental Immunization Activity schedule, as well as improvements in the quality of vaccination campaigns. With funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, emergency operations centers (EOCs) have been established at the national and provincial levels. UNICEF and Rotary have been helping implement health camps to provide much needed services in addition to polio vaccination in high-priority communities. The United Arab Emirates is including support for polio eradication as part of its bilateral support to Pakistan. WHO and UNICEF are scaling up support to the Pakistani program. CDC will work with WHO, the Gavi Alliance, and other partners to accelerate improvements in routine immunization, including introduction of Inactivated Poliovirus Vaccine (IPV). Highly functional EOCs, widespread health camps in key areas, and improvement in routine immunization (including IPV introduction) are key priorities for the coming months.

The Pakistani people solidly support polio eradication. In a poll conducted a year ago by the Harvard School of Public Health and sponsored by UNICEF, more than 95% of people across most high risk areas of the country thought that giving polio drops to their children was a "good idea." In FATA, despite 48% of residents having

heard at least one destructive rumor about polio vaccine and 33% believing those rumors, 86% said that giving polio drops to children in the neighborhood was a “very good” or “somewhat good” idea, and only 2% said it was a “bad” idea. The poll provided other insights that the government and UNICEF have used to tailor communication around polio, including that many parents believed incorrectly that polio was curable.

In the upcoming year, supporting the Pakistani government’s effort to eliminate polio will be the top priority for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. At the same time, it will be crucial to finish the job in Africa and resume progress in Afghanistan. I’ll talk more about that in future letters.

Thank you for what you do to protect the world’s children.



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Chairman, Polio Oversight Board

