

1 November 2018

Dear Colleagues,

At the end of September, I traveled to New York City for the UN General Assembly. It was an action-packed week that was capped off by the latest Polio Oversight Board (POB) meeting, where partners and donors of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) discussed plans for the next chapter of the polio program.

In this letter, I'd like to share an update on our discussion, which focused largely on the GPEI's strategy and budget for 2019-2023 and a recent external review of progress commissioned by the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB).

The Next Chapter of the Polio Program

The [Polio Eradication & Endgame Strategic Plan 2013-2018](#) has guided the GPEI's efforts to deliver a polio-free world for more than five years. Though polio virus transmission is still present at low levels, the lessons we've learned in this time period are helping us now strengthen our approach so we can soon cross the finish line.

The GPEI is currently working with stakeholders to develop a new strategy for the years 2019-2023 titled, "Polio Eradication, Certification and Integration: The Endgame Strategy." While the program has made tremendous progress, the POB acknowledged the need to think innovatively to finish the job as soon as possible. This new strategy will outline which tactics are working well, what can be improved and where new ideas are needed for success.

One topic we discussed at length was the importance of ensuring that the polio program is responding to the unique needs of the communities it is serving. Several ideas were discussed and will be pursued in the coming months.

To support program activities during 2019-2023, the POB approved a budget of \$4.2 billion, of which an additional \$3.27 billion will need to be raised.

External Review of Progress

The POB also discussed the findings of an [external review](#) of progress in the three remaining polio-endemic countries – Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan – commissioned by the IMB.

While commending the program for enhanced efforts to reach every child with vaccines at the local, national and global levels, the review team highlighted that barriers to access and hard-to-reach communities remain the biggest challenges to progress. In order to increase access in all three countries, they emphasized the need for increased support for health workers and government officials, continued



An infant receives the oral polio vaccine during an immunization campaign in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. © UNICEF

outreach to local leaders to bolster trust in the program's activities and collaboration to strengthen basic health services and routine immunization in at-risk areas.

Dr. Tedros as New POB Chair

I am thrilled to announce that WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus will take on the role of POB chair beginning next year. I can speak for the POB partnership when I say we all hope to see the last case of wild polio during Dr. Tedros' tenure. Congratulations, Dr. Tedros!

Finally, it was great to see hundreds of thousands of voices call for continued commitment to #EndPolio during World Polio Day on 24 October. In addition to significant buzz on social media, there were events around the world and several pieces in the media on the importance of dropping to zero cases, including an [op-ed in TIME by Rotary International President Barry Rassin and Dr. Tedros](#). The day served as a strong affirmation that together we will enter this bold next chapter of the program and create a healthier, polio-free world for children everywhere.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Elias", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chris Elias
President, Global Development, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Chairman, Polio Oversight Board