

Dear polio eradication supporter,

On this year's World Polio Day, we celebrate the global commitments made toward a polio-free world over the past few months and look ahead to the challenges and opportunities that remain for the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) in 2023.

In September, the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) released its [22nd report](#), which provides a rigorous independent review of the polio program's progress towards the goals set out in the GPEI's [2022-2026 Strategy](#). The report concluded that despite recent steps forward towards eradication, remaining challenges will make it difficult to reach the program's set targets for Goal 1 and Goal 2 – which strive to interrupt all remaining poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) transmission and circulating variant poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) transmission by the end of 2023.

The GPEI welcomes the latest review from the IMB and appreciates the board's continued scrutiny and commitment to ending polio. The GPEI understands the challenges outlined in the report and is taking its recommendations seriously. At the Polio Oversight Board (POB) meeting in October, we had the opportunity to collaborate and finalize our collective response to the report and discuss the necessary actions that must be taken to overcome the remaining hurdles to deliver a polio-free world. The POB took the following decisions: for Goal 1, we agreed to continue to target the current timeline to interrupt transmission in the endemic countries in the 2024 low season and achieve certification in 2026; for Goal 2, we agreed to extend the timeline for cVDPV interruption to 2025 with certification in 2028; and lastly, the 2024 GPEI operational budget was approved with a request to have the Multi-Year Budget developed by the end of Q2 2024. The GPEI remains confident we can eradicate this deadly disease. But the findings of the report make clear that there remains an urgent need for renewed commitments from partners, donors, and country governments, in addition to program improvements, to seize the window of opportunity to end polio for good.

Reaching these programmatic goals is not possible without strong regional commitment. In August, I participated at the [73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee Meeting for Africa](#) in Botswana, where Ministers of Health from Member States pledged to intensify efforts to end all forms of the virus. Discussion focused on stopping WPV1 and cVDPV outbreaks through improved vaccination and disease surveillance efforts. As the African Region now finds itself one year out from the [last confirmed case of imported wild polio](#), this continued commitment is encouraging.

Last week in Cairo, I had the opportunity to join the ninth meeting of the [Regional Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks in the Eastern Mediterranean](#), held during the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean. Member States were urged to provide full support for communities affected by outbreaks and were reminded that eradication will only be achieved through collective action. We learned that as of October 2023, Afghanistan and Pakistan each only have a single genetic cluster of WPV circulating. For comparison, in 2020, there were sixteen clusters of polioviruses reported in circulation across both countries. During the meeting, member states voted to nominate Dr. Hanan Balkhy as the next EMRO Regional Director. Following appointment by the WHO Executive Board in January 2024, she will take over from the current Regional Director, Dr. Ahmed Al-Mandhari, whose 5-year term ends in January. Prior to her nomination as Regional Director, Dr. Balkhy served as WHO Assistant Director-General for Antimicrobial Resistance. Born in Saudi Arabia, she was the first Executive Director for Infection Prevention and Control at the Saudi Arabian Ministry of National Guard.

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I applaud the Member States across both the African and Eastern Mediterranean regions who are committed to ending polio in the endemic and outbreak countries. Thanks to their continued efforts we are seeing lower case counts across the world, and as a result, more children are growing up in polio-free communities.

Along with seeing the strong support from leadership across these regions, I was also inspired to learn about the [outbreak closure in Ukraine](#). In September, after months of determination from health workers doing vaccination and surveillance work, WHO Europe declared an outbreak of polio in Ukraine officially closed. Closing this outbreak, despite the extreme challenges of war, is a major achievement and demonstration of strong political and regional commitment.

In addition to regional commitment, donor support for polio eradication remains strong. In October, the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a [new financing partnership](#). This € 1.1 billion financing package, with € 500 million for GPEI, aims to provide funding to eradicate polio and help solve the health and development challenges faced by those who do not have fair access to healthcare services and innovations. I am excited by this unique partnership and am grateful for continued donor support which will make the dream of a polio-free world a reality.

The [Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust](#) also announced a US\$ 3 million grant to support the GPEI and protect children around the world from the devastating impacts of polio. Thank you to the Helmsley Trust for this generous grant.

While in New York City for the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly, I had the privilege of attending [The Moth polio storytelling event](#), where storytellers shared their lived polio experiences, and highlighted importance of achieving eradication. Human stories are powerful and help bring to life some of the world's most complex problems – they make the case numbers we see every day real.

As we look ahead, I'm encouraged by the opportunities that the rest of 2023 brings. So far, a total of 800 million doses of nOPV2 have been administered across thirty-five countries worldwide, and prequalification is expected in the coming months. As we celebrate the strides made with nOPV2, today, we also celebrate the breadth of global support we've seen for World Polio Day. I, along with new and existing polio champions, have joined the [Make Polio History](#) campaign, raising our voices in support of polio eradication. This year's World Polio Day is an important reminder that through collective global support we can deliver a polio-free world.

This year is proving to be the most critical for a polio-free world – it is vital that we continue to strengthen our resolve and maintain positive momentum as we get closer and closer to the finish line. I am confident that with strengthened commitments, we can – and will – end polio. Thank you for your support.

Best regards,



Christopher J. Elias, MD, MPH
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Chair, Polio Oversight Board, Global Polio Eradication Initiative

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