

CHAIRS' STATEMENT

High Level Meeting of the Global Polio Partners Group (PPG)

Friday, 24 June 2016

Please note that the meeting presentations are available on the [PPG website](#).

On 24 June 2016, 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 headquarters. The meeting was attended by ca. 70 participants, including: representatives of core GPEI partners; stakeholders from governments at the ambassadorial, senior-officials, and expert level from capitals and the Permanent Missions in Geneva; international organizations, foundations, donors and other stakeholders.

On this occasion, the PPG counted with the presence of Dr Margaret Chan, Director General at WHO and member of the Polio Oversight Board (POB), and of Sir Liam Donaldson, Chair of Independent Monitoring Board (IMB). Dr. Chan reiterated that the world has never been so close to polio eradication while noting that until the job is done, progress will remain fragile and vulnerable. Dr Chan highlighted the long-standing commitment of political leaders to polio eradication, called for securing the achievement of a polio-free world, encouraged countries to strongly engage in transition planning and to support future health programmes under the SDGs, and called on donors to finance the programme. On a final note, Dr. Chan commended the positive impact of the IMB and thanked for its frank criticism as a trigger for progress and innovation of the polio programme.

The meeting started with the election by acclamation of Dr Jon Andrus, Executive Vice President and Director of Vaccine Advocacy and Education at the Sabin Vaccine Institute, as Co-chair of the PPG representing a non-State actor. He succeeds Ambassador John E. Lange, United Nations Foundation, at the end of his 4 years term. PPG stakeholders expressed their appreciation to the outstanding leadership of Ambassador Lange as PPG Co-chair and welcomed Dr Andrus in his new role.

Sir Liam noted that the polio programme is in a strong position to reach the finish line but regretted that new wild poliovirus cases were unfortunately detected during the low transmission mission in 2016. He conveyed a message of cautious optimism: wild poliovirus transmission can still be interrupted by 2016 but it requires a supreme effort and peak performance of the programme. He further highlighted that the programme had enormously benefitted from an increased focus on people and on local communities, as it provided a deeper understanding of why poliovirus was still sustained in some communities.

In addition, Dr. Thomas Frieden, Director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in his capacity as Chair of the POB, participated via teleconference. He appreciated the instrumental contribution of the PPG in mobilizing support for polio eradication, commended the progress made in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the last months, congratulated partners for the success of the vaccine switch and thanked countries for their efforts in this regard; and flagged some of the remaining challenges, inter alia, the need for high quality immunization and stronger surveillance. He insisted on the importance of mobilizing the financial resources to fully fund the programme and flagged the urgency of transition planning in an interconnected world in which countries need to strengthen their health systems as global health security becomes more and more important.

The main objective of the meeting was to provide an overview of the current developments of the polio programme: the status of polio eradication efforts, the vaccine switch and IPV supply constraint, the GPEI budget 2016-2019 and the transition planning process.

Mr. Michel Zaffran, Director of Polio eradication at WHO, and Mr. Reza Hossaini, Director of Polio eradication at UNICEF, provided stakeholders with an overview of the status of polio eradication and outlined the main programmatic priorities for 2016: stopping wild poliovirus transmission, rapid detection and response to any type 2 virus, implementation of the global containment action plan, increased scale up of Inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) supply, mobilisation of the additional US\$ 1.5 billion budget requirements and country led plans for the transitioning of GPEI assets.

Ms. Simona Zipursky, Technical Officer at WHO, on behalf of the Immunization Systems Management Group, provided stakeholders with an update on the success of the globally synchronized switch from trivalent oral polio vaccine (OPV) to bivalent OPV that took place from 17th April to 1st May 2016. She further elaborated on the current IPV supply constraint due to manufacturers' challenges in scaling-up production, on the principles endorsed by the POB to efficiently manage IPV supply and on the risk mitigation strategies.

Mr. André Doren, Senior Strategist, GPEI External Relations, briefed the PPG on the Financial Resource requirements ([FRR](#)) GPEI budget 2016-2019, on the resource mobilization strategy to reach the fundraising target and on the resource mobilization trends; and presented the new [investment case](#) recently published.

Finally, Dr. Paul Rutter, Chief Operations Officer, Polio Eradication at WHO, updated participants on the progress made to date on transition planning both at country and at global level. He further requested the PPG to engage in country planning processes, to review and provide feedback on the global planning framework that is being developed by the GPEI and encouraged nomination of members to the new IMB to be established which will oversee the transition planning process and will be chaired by Sir Liam Donaldson.

PPG stakeholders:

- Took note of the statements delivered by several Ambassadors and senior representatives which give testimony of the political support to the polio programme and called for continued global awareness and international coordinated response to eradicate polio.

- Welcomed the statements delivered by the representatives of Pakistan and Afghanistan and appreciated the strong high-level political commitment to polio eradication of the governments, praised the new interventions employed in these countries and the paradigm shift of the programme to chronically missed children in the last reservoirs which has proved to be very efficient. It further underscored the importance of maintaining the neutrality of the programme in areas facing security challenges.
- Stressed the need for strengthening routine immunization and surveillance systems, with a particular focus on environmental surveillance as it will become paramount once wild poliovirus transmission is interrupted. Stakeholders also noted the need to expand surveillance in conflict areas and to organise catch-up vaccination campaigns, and suggested expanding the age of vaccination in areas which have been inaccessible for some time.
- Expressed a concern on the increase of protracted crisis and the rise in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons that heightens the risk of international spread of pandemics, underscoring the crucial role of international cooperation and improved international coordination.
- Commended the great success of the vaccine switch from tOPV to bOPV, unprecedented in history, and acknowledged its contribution to further reducing the number of circulating vaccine derived poliovirus cases, which still remains a big concern.
- Welcomed the information on the IPV supply constraint and requested further guidance to countries on the fractional use of IPV as recommended by the SAGE. Stakeholders further encouraged the GPEI to actively work with the industry to address IPV shortage, to explore potential agreements with other manufacturers with a view to increasing IPV production and to minimize the impact of delayed IPV introduction.
- Expressed concern over the obligations laid down in the proposed Containment and Certification Scheme to minimize polio virus facility associated risks which are burdensome and costly for countries. It further noted that timelines of the Global Action Plan III had been underestimated and sought information as to whether timelines would be revised in light of the one year extension of the programme. Stakeholders urged WHO to play a more prominent role in the certification process.
- Thanked the GPEI for the financial update on the revised GPEI budget for the period 2016-2019 endorsed by the POB in April 2016, welcomed the additional financial contributions announced at the meeting and called on affected countries, donors and partners for sustained financing of the programme. The Group encouraged the GPEI to adapt funding tactics to countries with a view to facilitating ways to contribute financially and to benefit from the PPG to reach out to

other counterparts. Stakeholders expressed a preference for having more regular reporting on the GPEI budget to better assess programme implementation.

- Underscored the importance of a comprehensive well-thought transition planning process in the new SDGs era as key contribution to building resilient health systems while strengthening other health initiatives and sustaining the gains of the GPEI. At the same time, stakeholders emphasized the tremendous risk for the continuation of health services especially in the high risk countries if transition would fail.
- Reiterated the call made by some Member States during the last World Health Assembly for having a discussion at the global level at the governing bodies of the WHO and requested further information on the roles and responsibilities in the overall transition planning process.
- Encouraged countries to finalize transition plans in collaboration with donors and partners and supported the work currently undertaken by the GPEI to guide transition planning at the global level. It further flagged the role of the GPEI in supporting countries to map the polio assets.
- Welcomed the role of the new IMB group that will soon be established to oversee the transition planning process and took note of the invitation to propose members.
- Discussed the possibility of holding a workshop at the programmatic and technical level on transition planning in Geneva in the fall and agreed that the co-chairs will inform participants at a later stage on the date and scope.
- Briefly discussed the future of GPEI. At this stage participants agreed that beside the transition planning, clarity on potential financing implications for the period beyond 2019 is important, especially with regard to the budgets of WHO and UNICEF, and how these organizations are addressing those. GPEI was also encouraged to enter or further deepen a dialogue with other global health initiatives, such as GAVI, to explore potential synergies and areas of collaboration.
- Reiterated the vital role that community engagement plays in polio eradication and in other health initiatives, and in particular, the great contribution of female community workers in advancing the programme. The role of religious leaders and the media was also underscored by the Group.
- Approved the PPG Terms of Reference as updated, reflecting accurately the current GPEI structure following the 2014 GPEI Oversight and Management Review.

The PPG asked the two Co-chairs to send the Chairs' Statement summarizing results of the meeting to the GPEI Polio Oversight Board, the Strategy Committee and the Independent Monitoring Board for their consideration and action as appropriate and asked the Co-chairs to represent their views at the next POB in-person meeting.