



## **The Role of Religious Scholars and Community Leaders in Polio Eradication and Routine Immunization**

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It is understood how important it is for the endemic countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria) and the whole international community to eliminate polio. Still poliovirus poses a direct threat to children, who are vulnerable to get the virus from other infected children in endemic areas. The threat even extends to the neighboring countries, namely, in areas where the inhabitants mingle with people coming from the affected countries. This is especially true because it is mostly easy to move from one country to another; i.e. it is almost impossible to restrict patients to a specific area and/or country. Hence, no country is immune from polio risk. The international community should act assertively and synergistically towards the prevention and eradication of polio, regardless of how much money and efforts are required. Protecting the homeland should be priority one in all countries. Citizens should also be regarded as the most valuable asset that needs protection, care and preservation. Failure to prevent polio or being reluctant to do so would lead countries to lose many of their people to this disease, and incur large sums of money that could have been potentially saved, if enough efforts and money was exerted to prevent the disease and limit it to the already-affected areas. This is actually an Islamic obligation that should be fulfilled by all Muslims, be they governed or governing. This is further asserted by the hadith of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), in which he says: *“If you hear of an outbreak of a plague in a land, do not enter it; and if the plague breaks out in a place while you are there, do not leave that place.”* The Prophet's guidance is not limited to plagues only, but actually includes all

infectious diseases. He used the word “*plague*” in particular because it was known back then as a serious killer.

Most countries have successfully eliminated polio. In fact, they have also exerted enormous efforts towards reducing other infectious diseases, such as typhoid, measles and other diseases that used to kill children and adults, by providing routine vaccinations as a means of disease prevention. It is well-known that prevention is better than treatment.

Muslim scholars and preachers are obliged, by Islamic laws, to urge and encourage people to have their children vaccinated. Vaccination should also be addressed during Friday prayer sermons (*Khutbah Jumu'a*) and in other religious occasions, at mosques, clubs, etc., because it protects children against death and disability. This comes in line with the Islamic Shariah and constitutes one of the five imperatives that should be observed according to the Shariah; i.e. sustaining religion, soul, offspring, money and mind.

It has been ascertained that vaccination is key to disease prevention, and a means to save lives. Allah, the AlMighty, forbids us from causing ourselves any harm; He says in the Holy Quran: “...and cast not yourselves into destruction with your own hands...”<sup>(1)</sup>

Muslim scholars and preachers are responsible to teach people that preserving one's life is an obligation, according to the Islamic perspective, and vaccination is the key towards this end. Therefore, vaccination is also an obligation.

Hence, it is an obligation, mainly upon religious scholars and preachers, as well as community leaders, media professionals and the well-educated persons, to guide people and educate them about the importance and usefulness of routine vaccinations, in addition to the risks of non-vaccination. They should also highlight the Shariah perspective on vaccination.

As for community leaders, they are also expected to provide support and assistance for vaccination officers, by protecting them, keeping them away from

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<sup>1</sup>) Surat Al-Baqarah [verse 195]

harm, and withstanding those who hinder their work, whether by words and/or action.

In conclusion, Muslim scholars and preachers are the community's intellectual leaders. They have a duty to protect people against fallacies, especially the extremist calls against vaccination.

Thank you