

## **Joint Afghanistan-Pakistan Eminent Ulema Conference for Supporting Polio Eradication**

*9-10 Shaban 1440 / 14-15 April 2019*

*Muscat, Sultanate of Oman*

### **Declaration on protecting children from poliomyelitis in Afghanistan and Pakistan**

*“If anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind.”  
(Al-Maeda:32)*

Praise be to Allah and prayers and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah and on his kin and companions.

We, the Ulema of Afghanistan and Pakistan gathered here in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman on 14-15 April 2019 to support the efforts towards protecting children from lifelong polio paralysis and in partnership with the Islamic Advisory Group (IAG),

- Acknowledging and fully supporting IAG’s expanded mandate into other maternal and child health priorities including personal hygiene and sanitation to protect women, children and all segments of society;
- Affirming that safeguarding the health and well-being of children is the responsibility of all religious, community and political leaders, and of parents and care-givers;
- Underlining that vaccinating children is a moral and religious obligation, and not allowing or not vaccinating even a single child is a serious deviation from this important collective obligation as the Prophet Mohammed, blessings and peace be upon him, said, “It is sin enough for one to cause the loss of whom he feeds” (Abu Dawoud);
- Acknowledging that polio is a devastating disease that leaves affected children paralyzed and disabled for the rest of their lives;
- Highlighting that polio eradication is a noble cause aimed at making the world a healthier place for children;
- Noting with deep concern that Afghanistan and Pakistan remain the only two countries in the world where children are still paralysed by wild poliovirus and that the persistence of polio transmission is a common challenge to both countries which must be addressed in a coordinated manner;
- Recognizing the efforts of the polio eradication programmes in Afghanistan and Pakistan towards implementing their respective National Emergency Action Plans, which have led to a significant reduction in the number of polio cases;
- Acknowledging that Afghanistan and Pakistan are consistently missing some children during polio vaccination campaigns, and that children in border areas and among mobile population groups are particularly at risk;

- Noting with deep concern that some parents and caregivers continue to display a reluctance in allowing their children to be vaccinated against polio due to misinformation or religious misunderstandings;
- Understanding that polio transmission will be rapidly stopped once all children everywhere are consistently reached and vaccinated every time;

DECLARE and re-affirm our commitment and responsibility to the protection of children against all vaccine-preventable diseases;

REITERATE our trust in the safety, purity and effectiveness of all routine childhood vaccinations as life-saving tools that protect children; and acknowledge that their use to prevent disease conforms to Islamic Shariah;

COMMIT to work together across the border with local Imams, communities and public health authorities as necessary, to convince all parents on the urgent need to allow all children to be vaccinated against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases;

CONDEMN any misuse of public health activities for purposes other than the promotion of health and prevention of disease, and we call on all organizations and parties to maintain strict neutrality in the planning and implementation of all public health activities, including polio vaccination campaigns;

CONDEMN the attacks launched against health workers, as they contravene Islamic teachings and human values, and demand that governments, local societies, civil societies and religious organizations extend all necessary assistance to ensure the safety and security of all health workers;

APPEAL to all the religious leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan to provide strong support for health workers to access all areas and encourage parents to facilitate the vaccination of their children particularly in the hard-to-reach and difficult-to-access areas, and among mobile population groups;

CALL on political and civil society leaders at all levels in both countries to intensify their efforts and ensure that every child is reached and vaccinated during every polio vaccination campaign, with particular focus on children who are difficult to access or reach for whatever reason; and,

REQUEST the support and commitment of all relevant local, national and global partners to rapidly make available all necessary resources needed to achieve success;

COMMIT to work together as religious scholars, in solidarity, to support the achievement of a polio-free Afghanistan and Pakistan, and ultimately a polio-free world, for the good of future generations.

APPRECIATE the governments and health authorities of Afghanistan and Pakistan for not only saving children from polio paralysis – by the will of Allah – but also for instating the routine

immunization programme that saves children from many fatal diseases including measles and tetanus;

COMMEND the tremendous efforts made by health workers everywhere to protect children from diseases such as polio, and encourage respect and support for their efforts;

We would finally like to thank Al Azhar Al Sharif, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, the Islamic Development Bank and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation for supporting polio eradication through the joint forum of the Islamic Advisory Group; and the Sultanate of Oman for hosting this conference and the hospitality offered.