

# THE ISLAMIC ADVISORY GROUP

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## IAG holds seventh annual meeting, reiterates commitment to polio



From left to right: OIC Secretary General, IIFA President, Al-Azhar Al Sharif Deputy and IsDB Vice President

The seventh annual meeting of the IAG was hosted virtually by OIC Secretary General Dr Yousef Al-Othaimeen on 7 December 2020 with the participation of the other IAG founding partners Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the IIFA and the IsDB.

“While our Member States and people continue to battle the worst health emergency of our time [COVID-19], it is important not to lose sight of our main goal as IAG of ensuring the eradication of polio in the remaining endemic countries and promoting maternal and child health, as well as addressing other areas of routine immunization,” Al-Othaimeen said in his opening remarks.

“It is critical for us to protect our hard-won gains against polio and other diseases that afflict our vulnerable children.”

IIFA President Sheikh Saleh Bin Humaid, who chaired the meeting, underlined the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19.

“There is no doubt implementation of initiatives to eradicate polio and improve maternal and child health has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as a result of lockdowns and restrictions on movement,” he said.

“We are still hopeful that health awareness has increased among the public and people are now more convinced of the importance of

immunization to prevent vaccine-preventable diseases, including polio, measles and rubella.”

Dr Mohamed Abdelrahman Al-Dawini, Deputy of Al Azhar Al Sharif, criticized those who had questioned the permissibility of vaccinations in Islam.

These allegations, he insisted, contradict fatwas agreed by scholars on the necessity of vaccination as a vital means of saving lives.

Al-Dawini urged all parents and guardians to vaccinate children against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Dr Mansur Mokhtar, Vice President of the IsDB, reiterated the Bank’s commitment to continuing collaboration with all partners to support Member States ensure healthy lives and promote health and well-being for all at all ages.

“The IsDB has continued its support as the main donor for polio eradication in Pakistan, with a total approved budget of US\$ 427 million from 2013 to 2020,” he said.

In his address to the meeting, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, thanked the IAG leaders for their dedication to eradicating polio.

“The Eastern Mediterranean Region is now the world’s only remaining region with wild polio transmission. We

reaffirm our commitment to the eradication of this scourge,” he said.

“We need to learn from the COVID-19 response, which has demonstrated yet again the important role played by the IAG, religious scholars and faith-based organizations in dealing with global health emergencies,” asserted Dr Al-Mandhari.

In a statement issued at the end of the meeting, IAG leaders reaffirmed commitment to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) and alignment with the OIC’s Strategic Health Programme of Action (SHPA).

Noting that Afghanistan and Pakistan are now the only remaining countries globally with endemic wild poliovirus transmission, they urged the governments of both countries to fast track efforts to eradicate the menace of polio in its last reservoirs.

The IAG leaders called upon religious and influential community leaders to fully support ongoing polio eradication efforts and mobilize parents and caregivers to regularly vaccinate children against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

They also called upon international organisations and other stakeholders to work collaboratively at all levels to develop, test, and scale up production of safe, effective, quality, affordable diagnostics, therapeutics, medicines and vaccines for the COVID-19 response .

### About the IAG

The Islamic Advisory Group (IAG) was launched in 2013 after consultations between Al Azhar Al Sharif, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) who make up the core membership of the group along with eminent religious scholars, technical experts and academics. The IAG aims to align correct religious teachings with technical information on priority public health issues and communicate that to concerned communities by leveraging widely respected local religious scholars.

### IAG Secretariat

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## IGAG organizes TOT for Mogadishu University faculty on capacity-building



The faculty will train 100 Sharia and medical students on health priorities in 2021

The IGAG organized a five-day training of trainers (TOT) for selected faculty members of the University of Mogadishu to equip them with the knowledge and skills to build the capacity of senior Shariah and medical students.

"We are working to establish a strong and sustainable partnership with health and religious education institutions and build their capacity to train students to advocate for public health interventions, with priority given to polio eradication," said Dr Abdulwahab Al-Anesi, focal person for the National Islamic Advisory

Group (NIAG) in Somalia.

The virtual training was conducted by Professor Attia Es-Sayed Abdul-Aal, Vice Dean of Faculty of Education, Al-Azhar University, and attended by 15 lecturers from the faculties of Shariah and Medicine.

It covered subjects such as effective teaching strategies, effective presentation skills, student motivation and constructive alignment.

"As faculty members we spend too much time preparing students for

standardized tests that eventually will serve them very little in the real world," said Farhia Mohamud, Director of the MU's Mother and Child Educational Care Centre.

"This training programme, without a doubt, will have a significant impact on the way we teach our students by broadening their scope of general knowledge, widening their visions and broadening their minds," she asserted.

Employing the new acquired skills, the lecturers will

conduct four training workshops to a hundred final year Sharia and medical students on the importance of routine immunization, polio eradication, maternal and child health and hygiene from health and religious perspectives.

The objective is for these students to become advocates for public health interventions in their local communities to reduce morbidity and mortality of vaccine-preventable diseases and promote healthy lifestyles.

"We need to mobilize local communities to immunize children through engaging religious scholars and students to address vaccination hesitancy and refusals," asserted Al-Anesi.

"We are planning similar activities with universities in Somaliland and Puntland in the future," he added.

The NIAG has been striving to support public health in Somalia in conformity with Islamic teachings since 2016.

## NIAG Afghanistan trains religious scholars on health priorities



The training focused on the importance of vaccination against preventable diseases

The National Islamic Advisory Group (NIAG) in Afghanistan organized a comprehensive training course on public health priorities, particularly polio eradication and routine immunization, for 28 eminent religious scholars from different high-risk provinces.

"Afghanistan is an Islamic country and religious scholars have a prominent role in the society and they are leading the

communities," said Dr Khakerah Rashidi, National Emergency Operations Centre Director.

The five-day training, conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and with support from WHO and UNICEF, focused on the importance of communicable diseases prevention, routine immunization, polio eradication, maternal and child health, personal

hygiene and the COVID-19 response from health and religious perspectives.

"To gain the support of eminent and influential religious scholars, they should first be provided with basic knowledge of public health priorities," said Dr Rashidi.

"Therefore, this training conducted by NIAG is a basic and successful step toward strategic engagement of Ulama and gaining their open support for public health priority programmes, particularly polio

eradication and routine immunization," he added.

Dr Rashidi asserted that Afghanistan is facing social challenges with polio vaccine acceptance, in particular in areas where literacy is low.

"This is an important responsibility of religious scholars to raise awareness in such communities since the vaccines are protecting their children against fatal childhood diseases."

The participating scholars reaffirmed support to public health programmes, urging parents to vaccinate children against polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Since its establishment in 2016, the NIAG has been providing support to the Polio Eradication Initiative through the active engagement of religious scholars in support of polio vaccination and routine immunization in high-risk provinces.