

# THE ISLAMIC ADVISORY GROUP (IAG)

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## IAG reviews student training manual with partners



Authors of the student training manual along with WHO and UNICEF technical and communication experts

An Advisory Committee Consultation was organized by the IAG on 6-7 March in order to facilitate discussions over its Student Training Manual. The manual is being developed by the Al Azhar University's International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research (IICPSR), and the meeting held at WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) provided a venue for its authors to receive feedback from the technical and communication experts working in polio eradication, routine immunization, and maternal and child health at WHO and UNICEF. IAG country focal points from

Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Somalia also participated in the meeting.

Dr. Mahmoud Fikri, Regional Director of WHO/EMRO, welcomed Dr. Ahmed Hosny, Rector of Al Azhar University, and extended his appreciation to the Grand Imam of Al Azhar Al Sharif, Dr. Ahmed El-Tayeb, and the leaders of the IAG for their support to eradicate polio. Dr. Hosny wished the meeting well and prayed for its success in providing support to polio eradication.

Dr. Jaouad Mahjour, WHO/EMRO's Director of Programme Management,

and Dr. Gamal Serour, Director of the IICPSR, opened the meeting sessions by welcoming participants and thanking the IAG for its efforts.

Once the training manual has been finalized the IICPSR will begin delivering workshops to 1000 Al Azhar students from the priority countries, both within the graduate as well as the undergraduate programmes of the faculties of Islamic studies and law. The IAG also aims to expand the training programme to include other Islamic universities within the region.

## IAG to begin research into Islamic rulings on maternal and child health



International Islamic Fiqh Academy

The IAG has engaged one of its core partners, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), to conduct a study into Islamic references and citations that relate to its new focus on maternal and child health initiatives including routine immunization. Five priority areas had been identified for this new focus, namely breastfeeding, birth spacing, care-seeking behavior for pregnant mothers, hygiene and sanitation, in addition to immunization. While some of these areas will be investigated by the IIFA, others will be tackled by Al Azhar University.

Polio will remain the group's primary focus until eradication is achieved, but recommendations by the their third annual IAG meeting held in July 2016 aimed to expand the group's mandate to utilize its experience and network to benefit other health initiatives as well.

The IIFA is a subsidiary of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation established in 1981 with the aim of studying contemporary problems from the Shari'ah perspective and to look for solutions through an authentic interpretation of its content.

### About the IAG

The IAG was launched in 2013 after consultations between the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), Al Azhar Al Sharif, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) who make up the core membership of the group along with other religious scholars, technical experts and academics. It aims to muster support from Muslim religious scholars and groups, donor countries, and organizations for the global effort to end polio in the high risk areas of priority countries (Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Somalia).

## IAG Executive Committee Chairman meets with OIC Secretary General



Dr. Yagob Al-Mazrou, IAG Executive Committee Chairman, meeting with Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimen, OIC Secretary General

The Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimen, received the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the IAG, Dr. Yagob Al-Mazrou, at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah on 19 April.

Dr. Al-Mazrou thanked the OIC Secretary General for his leadership in mobilizing political support for the efforts of the IAG in the fight against polio. He briefed the Secretary General on the expanded role of the IAG to support maternal and child health initiatives, particularly in the priority areas of breastfeeding, immunization,

birth spacing, hygiene and sanitation, and care-seeking behavior.

On his part Dr. Al-Othaimen expressed his appreciation for the role of the IAG in dispelling misconceptions about polio vaccination in polio endemic countries. He pledged support for the expanded mandate of the IAG to cover issues pertaining to maternal and child health and emphasized that the IAG should continue focusing on providing training to students, religious scholars, and community leaders on the role of Islam in promoting maternal and child health.

## IAG approaches Islamic NGOs for collaboration

Islamic NGOs, both local and international, are being approached by the IAG in order to engage them in its future activities related to the expanded mandate of promoting maternal and child health including routine immunizations. Many of these NGOs already work on the ground in IAG priority countries doing much needed work for the

communities. With the IAG starting to work on these important issues as well, it will see how to best utilize its experience and human resources in order to complement the work of these NGOs while offering support to these organizations where their experience or presence might be lacking especially in high risk areas. These efforts

will be coordinated through the NIAGs on the ground. Globally, maternal, newborn and child health are a major public health concern. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region alone, where some countries have the highest maternal and child deaths worldwide, almost 80 mothers and 2400 children die every day due to preventable causes.

### IAG secretariat

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## Polio update

5 wild polio cases of type 1 have been reported so far in 2017:

- 2 in Pakistan
- 3 in Afghanistan

This represents a positive development compared to the same time period last year when the total number of cases reported was 13. The year 2016 saw the lowest ever annual number of polio cases in Pakistan.

## Talks with Islamic University in Uganda



The IAG has begun talks with the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) to expand the student training programme into Africa once it has been finalized at Al Azhar University in Egypt. The training programme aims to prepare students coming from IAG priority countries to understand critical health initiatives

and advocate for them among their home communities. Dr. Ahmed Sengendo, Rector of IUIU, welcomed the IAG initiative to his university whose students come from around 20 African countries to study Islamic law and medicine among the university's 7 faculties.

The IUIU was established in 1988 with financial support from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It hosts more than 8000 students coming from around 20 countries who take their degrees in law, science, education, management studies, arts & social sciences, and Islamic studies & Arabic language.