

# THE ISLAMIC ADVISORY GROUP

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## Delegation from the Islamic University in Uganda visits Al Azhar Al Sharif and WHO in Cairo



The Grand Imam of Al Azhar Al Sharif received the Rector of the Islamic University in Uganda and members of the IAG executive committee and secretariat.

A delegation from the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) visited Al Azhar Al Sharif on 13 February to discuss avenues of cooperation with Cairo's 1000 year old center of learning. Dr Ahmad Kawesa Sengendo, Rector of IUIU, and Dr Abdul Hafiz Walusimbi, Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic language, met with Dr Ahmed El Tayyib, the Grand Imam, and Dr Mohammed El Mahrasawy, Rector of Al Azhar University who pledged to provide the IUIU with academic support

through the secondment of Al Azhar teaching staff to both its religious studies programmes as well as to its faculties of applied sciences especially medicine.

The IUIU leaders also met with the secretariat of the IAG and met with Dr Gamal Serour, Director of the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research (IICPSR) where IAG's student training curriculum was developed and the

workshops are currently being held. The IAG is in discussions with the IUIU to host similar workshops aimed to teach international students of religious studies from 20 countries including polio endemic and at-risk ones in the Eastern Mediterranean Region about polio and the vaccines being used against it by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. The workshops also teach students about routine immunization and other maternal and child health initiatives that are critical for the health of women and children in their communities. Once students have completed their studies they return home to become mosque imams and religious scholars trusted by their local communities.

During their visit the delegation met with the World Health Organization's Acting Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Jaouad Mahjour, and the directors of the regional office's various divisions. The WHO leaders pledged the IUIU technical support and to ensure links with counterparts at WHO's Regional Office for Africa, under which Uganda falls. The IAG secretariat is based in WHO's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

## Mullahs support immunization campaigns through mosques in Afghanistan

Before a polio campaign starts, mosques all across Afghanistan announce its approach a few days ahead. One of the Mullahs spreading the word about the importance of polio vaccination is Mohammad Hashim Azizi, who works in a local mosque in Herat. To him, eradicating polio is the duty of a Muslim.

"I wanted to start working for the polio programme as I wanted to serve my people and be a good Muslim. I believe that if you serve other people you serve Allah. Allah helps the people through you."

Mullah Azizi also works as a social mobilizer and cluster supervisor during polio campaigns and is happy that Afghanistan is making progress in polio eradication.

"I haven't seen any cases here recently, but with the older generations polio was common."



Mullah Mohammad Hashim Azizi (left) hangs banner on polio vaccination in the busy streets of Herat on the first day of a national immunization campaign in March 2018. (Photo credit: WHO/Tuuli Hongisto)

He thinks it is important for religious leaders to teach people about vaccinations.

"In Afghanistan, Mullahs are respected and people listen to what we say. I also talk to children in religious classes about the importance of vaccinations."

## OIC confirms hosting Fifth Annual IAG Meeting in November



Leaders of the four partner organization of the IAG at the First Annual IAG Meeting hosted by the OIC in Jeddah in 2014, along with the former Regional Director of WHO/EMRO (left).

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), a core partner of the IAG, has confirmed its readiness to host the fifth annual IAG

meeting scheduled to take place on 14 November 2018.

Since it hosted the first meeting in 2014 the IAG has

alternated between Cairo and Jeddah to hold its meetings in the home cities of the headquarters of Al Azhar Al Sharif and the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), the two co-chair organizations of the IAG who provide religious backing and support to the group.

The return of the meeting to the OIC represents a full circle back to the organization's headquarters after it had moved between Al Azhar Al Sharif and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). During that first meeting a statement of support for vaccination workers was issued while condemning any attacks made against them for

performing their duties. This and subsequent meetings also witnessed the eminent scholars of the IAG urge parents to vaccinate children against this debilitating disease and addressed concerns among families regarding the content of the vaccines and their safety and permissibility within Islamic law.

Expected to attend the fifth annual meeting will be the heads of the four partner organizations including the Grand Imam of Al Azhar Al Sharif (or his Deputy), the President and the Secretary General of the IIFA, the President of the IsDB while being hosted by His Excellency the Secretary General of the OIC.

### 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 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 (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia).

IAG secretariat

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### Polio update

Eight wild polio cases of type 1 have been reported so far in 2018:

- 7 in Afghanistan
- 1 in Pakistan.

Efforts are ongoing through the implementation of national emergency action plans in both countries to address remaining gaps in coverage and surveillance, and in close coordination with each other.

### Student training programme continues at Al Azhar University



Al Azhar University's International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research (IICPSR) continued to hold IAG's student training workshops at its headquarters throughout the months of February and March. Around 25 students participate in each workshop coming mostly from the IAG priority countries

of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Nigeria. A total of 11 workshops are being conducted as part of this second phase of the project focusing mainly on third and fourth year students studying in the Shariah and Arabic studies programmes of the university.

