

THE ISLAMIC ADVISORY GROUP (IAG)

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IAG Supports Final Polio Push in Third Annual Meeting

During its third annual meeting on July 27, 2016, the Islamic Advisory Group (IAG) adopted a new work plan to help in the final push to end polio in Pakistan and Afghanistan while also expressing its intention to expand its role by supporting other vaccinations and mother and child health initiatives.

Heading the meeting were the leaders of the four IAG partner organizations: Dr. Saleh Bin Abdallah Bin Humaid, President of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA); Dr. Abbas Shouman, Vice President of Al Azhar Al Sharif on behalf of the Grand Imam; Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali, President of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB); and Ambassador Mohammed Naeem Khan, Assistant Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on behalf of the Secretary General. Also attending the meeting was Dr. Ala Alwan, Regional Director of the World Health Organization's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.



Leaders of partner organizations during opening session of the third annual meeting

The meeting held at the headquarters of the IsDB concluded with the issuing of a statement which among its articles stated that the IAG "reiterates its trust in the safety and effectiveness of all routine childhood vaccinations as a life-saving tool which protects children; and acknowledge that it fully conforms to Islamic rulings." The statement also affirmed the religious

obligation of parents to vaccinate their children to keep them healthy.

The new 2016-17 work plan approved by the meeting will focus on collaboration with Islamic NGOs and universities to spread awareness about vaccinations and mother and child health among local high risk communities in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Somalia.

NIAG Expands its Work in Pakistan



RSPs in Lakki Marwat district during case response session

A number of training workshops have been conducted in the high-risk blocks of Karachi, Quetta, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Training activities were supplemented by frequent media appearances involving 13 religious leaders across a wide

range of national and sub-national media outlets. Efforts of 787 Religious Support Persons (RSP) were made use of across 349 high-risk Union Councils (UCs) to address religious misconceptions among refusing families. A total of 60 members of the Provincial Scholars Task Forces (PSTFs) are managing and providing support to tackle polio reservoirs in the four high-risk blocks.

As a result of this work and other communication interventions, a decline of 61% of reported refusals has been observed in March 2016 as compared to March 2014. Furthermore, the active engagement of communities and religious leaders has led to a significant improvement in protecting vaccination teams, working in high risk

UCs in Karachi (Sindh) and Quetta, Pishin, and Qilla Abdullah districts (Baluchistan).

RSPs help spread awareness about the compliance of the polio vaccine with Islamic Sharia especially among those refusing to vaccinate their children on religious grounds.



PSTF in Quetta vaccinating children

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).

Afghan Scholars Convene to Support Polio Eradication



Kandahar Ulama conference

Ulama conferences in Kunar and Kandahar have rallied support from religious leaders for polio eradication. Over 100 Ulamas gathered for a conference in Kunar province in May and 90 Ulamas convened in Kandahar in June to show their support for the polio eradication effort. The Declaration adopted by Ulamas in a conference in Kabul in February was fully endorsed by Ulamas in both conferences. To enhance the programme's engagement with religious scholars, more

Ulama conferences are planned for 2016 in Helmand, Nangarhar and Farah provinces. A National Islamic Ulama Group (NIUG) was formed in the Kabul conference in February.

IAG Secretariat

www.iag-group.org

Al-Azhar to Train Students from High Risk Areas

A partnership has been built with the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research (IICPSR) of Al-Azhar University to train students from the priority countries of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Somalia, on advocating for vaccination and other mother and child health initiatives in the high risk areas to which they belong. As graduates of such a

prestigious academic institution, these students will be well placed within their local communities to dispel the kind of rumors and misinformation that hampers the work of vaccination teams in the high-risk areas of these countries. The proposal has been finalized in consultation with the NIAG's of Pakistan and Afghanistan and implementation of the proposed

plan is expected to begin in August 2016.

The IICPSR was founded at Al-Azhar University in co-operation with the UNFPA in 1975. Its objective is to conduct research in the Muslim World, dispel misconceptions about Islam, and functions as an inter-regional organization with a view to serve the whole Islamic World.



Dr. Gamal Serour, Director of the IICPSR

Polio Update

24 wild polio cases of type 1 have been reported so far in 2016:

- 14 in Pakistan
- 8 in Afghanistan
- 2 in Nigeria

The 2 cases in Nigeria were reported in Borno state with onset in July. This represented a setback for the country after going for two years without registering any such cases. In 2012 Nigeria represented half of the polio cases worldwide.

Frequently Asked Questions



What can you do to convince community leaders that vaccination is their duty?

We bring our expert, credible opinion to the discussions and convince any local leaders who oppose vaccination by showing them the Qu'ranic verses that command us to protect our children. We also partner with vaccina-

tion experts to reassure communities and leaders that the vaccine is acceptable for Muslims. We do all this while advocating for the safety and impartial treatment of health workers serving our children.

Why did the IAG begin its work by focusing on polio eradication?

Polio is one of only a few diseases which can be completely eradicated, such as was the case with smallpox. By eradicating polio children across the entire world will benefit, and no child or family need ever again know the pain of polio-paralysis. Most diseases cannot be similarly eradicated because the tools to eradicate them are not available.