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Islamic Advisory Group welcomes certification of eradication of wild poliovirus in WHO's African Region; reaffirms commitment to global eradication

The Islamic Advisory Group (IAG) welcomes the certification of eradication of all wild poliovirus strains from the African Region. The African Region is the fifth World Health Organization (WHO) region to be independently certified as free of all wild polioviruses. Wild poliovirus type 2 and type 3 were globally certified as eradicated in 2015 and 2019, respectively. The IAG commends the efforts of national governments, international organizations, religious and traditional leaders, public health experts, frontline health workers, donors, Rotarians, the media, educational institutions and parents towards this achievement.

“This is a major milestone achieved towards global eradication of wild poliovirus causing the paralysis of children,” said Dr Yagob Al-Mazrou, Chairman of the IAG's Executive Committee and member of the Global Commission for the Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication.

Cameroon, Central African Republic, Nigeria and South Sudan were the last four countries in WHO's African Region to be granted wild poliovirus-free status by the Africa Regional Certification Commission (ARCC) for poliomyelitis eradication.

The IAG would also like to take the opportunity of this momentous achievement to reiterate its full commitment to eradicating polio from the two remaining endemic countries – Afghanistan and Pakistan – both in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The Group also supports the resumption of polio vaccination campaigns – under strict precautionary and protective measures as recommended by WHO – after several months of suspension because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The IAG is a consortium of prestigious international Islamic organizations, including Al Azhar Al Sharif, International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). The Group also comprises a galaxy of eminent Shariah scholars and prominent health experts and academicians.

Since its establishment in 2013, the IAG focused on eradicating polio from the remaining endemic countries at that time – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia.

But the Group has also taken an interest in serving other African countries. In collaboration with Al-Azhar University and the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), the IAG has trained

hundreds of senior Shariah students from Nigeria, Uganda and other African countries on priority health issues, particularly polio and routine immunization. During the last year alone, the IUIU trained 181 students from Uganda, Nigeria, Somalia, Kenya and Malawi.

The IAG training strategy is based on preparing these senior students, as future religious leaders and scholars, to act as advocates for public health interventions in their local communities.