



Organisation of Islamic Cooperation



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Statement

Second Meeting of Islamic Advisory Group on Polio Eradication (IAG)

Cairo on 7 May 2015 | 19 Rajab 1436 AH

Praise be to Allah and prayers and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah and on his kin and companions!

The Islamic Advisory Group on Polio Eradication (IAG) reiterates its dedication to the principal goal of protecting the health, wellbeing and lives of children in the Muslim Ummah and mankind at large. In doing so it is guided and inspired by the teachings of Islam as well as the principles and instructions furthered and instilled by the Prophet Mohammad - peace and God's blessings be upon him. Any actions and behaviours deliberately or unconsciously compromising the health and welfare of children are strictly forbidden in Islam and explicitly proscribed in the holy Koran that says, "They are losers who foolishly have slain their children without knowledge, and have forbidden that which Allah bestowed upon them, inventing a lie against Allah. They indeed have gone astray and are not guided" (Al-Anaam: 140).

The members of the IAG, meeting in Cairo, Egypt, on 6 May 2015, under the leadership of Al Azhar Al Sharif, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB):

Having taken into consideration,

- a- The IAG's comprehensive recommendations and Islamic guidelines on child health, child protection and protection of health workers made in the "Jeddah Declaration," on 27 February 2014, based on Islamic Sharia
- b- The resolutions on child health and polio eradication adopted by the Islamic Summit and other OIC specialized conferences, including those of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) and Islamic conferences of Health Ministers;
- c- Al Azhar Declaration on Solidarity with the Children of the Muslim Ummah on 6th of March 2013;
- d- The *fatwas* and statements issued by the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, *Iftaa* institutions as well as senior scholars in the Muslim world based on the rulings of Islamic *Fiqh* on the safety and importance of childhood immunization;

- e- Significant financial support provided by Islamic countries and Islamic financial institutions, including the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), to implement mass polio immunization activities in polio-endemic and other polio-affected countries;

Having noted the strong commitment and dedicated efforts of OIC Member States to eradicate polio and protect all children from preventable diseases;

Having noted that of 359 polio cases reported in nine countries in 2014, around 95 per cent of the children affected were living in OIC member states, including from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Iraq and Syria; and in 2015, all of the 23 cases that have been reported are from just two OIC countries, Pakistan and Afghanistan;

Acknowledging the historic progress made in polio eradication efforts in Nigeria, Somalia, and that no polio cases have been reported for the past 9 months in all of Africa; that the polio outbreak in the Middle East has been stopped with no cases detected in Syria and Iraq for more than 12 months. Notwithstanding this tangible progress, possible regression to international spread of polio remains a threat;

Acknowledging with appreciation the specific actions undertaken as follow up to the recommendations of the IAG's "Jeddah Declaration," including the International Ulama Conference on Polio Eradication of 16 June 2014 held in Pakistan, and the Meeting on Somali Children's Health: Polio and other Immunizations in Khartoum, Sudan, of 29 January 2015, and other actions to disseminate the "Jeddah Declaration" and its guiding principles;

Having noted the significant efforts of the National Islamic Advisory Group (NIAG) in Pakistan that based on rulings of Islamic Sharia works to raise awareness among religious leaders about childhood vaccinations and address their concerns, and conduct training of community influentials in the most high-risk areas as religious support persons;

Acknowledging the continued challenges faced by the polio eradication programme in Pakistan and Afghanistan, including: lack of access to children in a few areas, misconceptions about the purpose of vaccination campaigns and safety of vaccines, deadly attacks on health workers, need for greater community engagement and support from religious and traditional leaders in certain high-risk areas; and need for ensuring the neutrality of health interventions in areas of insecurity;

The IAG, having examined the current status of global polio eradication, including its religious, cultural, social and health aspects, in close collaboration with trusted Islamic medical experts, states the following:

1. It strongly reaffirms the importance of Islamic solidarity in combating polio and its support for global polio eradication efforts; and acknowledges that it fully conforms to Islamic Sharia;

2. It reaffirms and highlights the recommendations made by the IAG in the “Jeddah Declaration,” which provides the basis for the development of a work plan to address the concerns highlighted during the meeting;
3. It expresses thanks to the government of Pakistan for their strong commitment and for the launching of the National Emergency Action Plan for polio eradication; calls on the National IAG to develop a country-specific strategy that is aligned with, and supports the full implementation of the emergency plan in the highest-risk communities and areas;
4. It appeals to all OIC member states to consider providing additional political, technical, financial and religious support to the last few polio affected countries; it also appeals to all Islamic financial institutions, including the Islamic Development Bank and philanthropic organizations to continue their excellent initiatives to provide much needed funding for vaccination efforts to protect children in OIC member states;
5. It endorses the IAG work plan for 2015-16 put forward by the Executive Committee and requests the Committee to closely monitor the implementation of this work plan through its monthly teleconferences and other periodic meetings, and seeks the support of the IAG when it would be beneficial;
6. It fully endorses the initiative to work closely with Islamic academic institutions including Al-Azhar University, the International Islamic University in Pakistan, the Islamic University in Madinah Al Munawarah and the Islamic University of Imam Muhammad Bin Saud in Riyadh, to systematically engage students of these universities who are from polio-priority countries and provide training on “Islam and Child health,” and to encourage these students to raise awareness of their communities in their home countries on the importance of immunization activities, including for polio;
7. It remains concerned about continued misinformation on polio and vaccinations, and it highlights the need to further disseminate information developed through the IAG more widely in all polio priority countries, in this regard it supports the establishment of the IAG website, and urges the development of additional communication efforts that can support the work of the NIAG and their networks of religious leaders. In this context, it urges mass media and opinion makers to make every possible contribution to improving public awareness, particularly among segments of society linked to roots of the problem, for the purpose of rectifying misperceptions and nurturing reasonable notions and behaviors towards polio vaccines and immunizations;
8. It strongly condemns the attacks on health workers and accompanying security personnel;

9. Given the existence of many other health issues in the Muslim world, the Group decides to consider the prospect of expanding its scope of work to possibly turn into the Islamic Health Advisory Group;
10. It expresses heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Al-Azhar Al S-Sharif for hosting this important meeting at its Conference Centre in Cairo and the Government of Egypt for its support.