



Islamic scholars appeal for urgent action to stop polio

ISLAMIC scholars from several countries met in Cairo, Egypt on 6 and 7 March and called for urgent action to complete polio eradication. “Crippled children lead to a crippled Muslim Ummah” (in Arabic meaning ‘nation’ or ‘community’), warned the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Doctor Ahmad Al Tayyeb. Al-Azhar is Sunni Islam’s highest seat of learning and the chief centre of Islamic and Arabic learning in the world.

Expressing their solidarity with children, the scholars reaffirmed their resolve to support people, health workers and governments of Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan - the three countries where polio still exists. Recognizing with grave concern the ongoing transmission of poliovirus in these countries, and in particular the deadly attacks against health workers in Pakistan and Nigeria in recent months, the scholars discussed ways on how the Islamic leadership can help these countries overcome obstacles preventing them from stopping polio transmission and ensure protection for all children.



Islamic scholars at a meeting in Cairo call for protection of Muslim children against polio.

Raina launches campaign to strengthen RI awareness for a polio-free India

Cricket star Suresh Raina launched the ‘Nurturing Trees, Nurturing Lives’ campaign in Delhi on February 24, on the first anniversary of India being removed from the WHO polio endemic countries’ list. “Every child needs to be nurtured and protected against vaccine preventable deadly diseases,” said UNICEF India Representative Mr Louis-Georges Arsenault at the launch.



Suresh Raina and UNICEF India Representative Louis-Georges Arsenault at the launch of the ‘Nurturing Trees, Nurturing Lives’ campaign in Delhi.

In the campaign, the sapling is synonymous of a child who needs to be nurtured and protected against deadly diseases, just as the sapling needs to be watered and cared for to grow into a healthy tree.

Nearly 36,000 saplings are targeted to be planted in 10 high priority states, including in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Those planting the saplings will pledge to contribute to RI awareness.

DID YOU KNOW ?

- It is important to ensure that every child in the first year of life is vaccinated against the seven vaccine preventable deadly diseases and with at least three doses of the oral polio vaccine as part of national routine immunization schedule.
- Routine immunization increases children’s immunity and protects them against vaccine preventable deadly diseases such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, hepatitis B and measles, including polio.

Ghulam Nabi Azad felicitated for 2-years polio free India

Minister for Health and Family Welfare Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad received a token of recognition from UNICEF, WHO and the GAVI Alliance on completion of two years of polio-free India. The felicitation was held on the second day of the ‘Call to Action’ Summit in Tamil Nadu from 7-9 February, 2013.

“We are very close to eradicating polio from the planet and great progress is being made every day,” said Helen Evans, Deputy CEO of GAVI Alliance, while presenting the memento along with Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and Dr Elizabeth Mason, Director – Maternal, Newborn & Child Health, WHO.



Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad receiving an award in recognition of India’s efforts to eradicate polio.

SMS to remind parents of polio immunization day

MTS and Tata Teleservices Ltd. sent out over 13 million SMS messages in multiple languages to their subscribers in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Maharashtra and West Bengal, reminding them of the Polio National Immunization Day on 24 February. MTS has been consistently supporting polio immunization rounds since 2010, while Tata Teleservices Ltd. is a recent partner and supported the campaign in the January round also. Over the years, the polio programme has been adopting innovative ways to reach out to people, reminding and mobilizing them for polio vaccination. The initiative during the February national polio round was rolled out under the banner of 'India Unite to End Polio Now', an Aidmatrix Foundation - UNICEF partnership.

Rotarians from Afghanistan observe India campaign

A team of Rotarians from Afghanistan observed the polio National Immunization Day in Bareilly and Badaun districts of Uttar Pradesh in January. They observed the communication and advocacy initiatives ahead of the polio round, booth day immunization and house-to-house activity. They interacted with the polio partners at the national, state and grass root level to understand the specific roles of each partner and how they work together to roll out the massive polio campaign. The district authorities apprised the Afghanistan delegation of all the initiatives leading up to the campaign. Enriched by the experience, the delegation intended to replicate some of India learning's and help strengthen the polio campaign in Afghanistan.



Rotarians from Afghanistan participating in a polio awareness rally in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh.

STAR MOBILIZER



Renu counseling mothers on routine immunization.

Sival Khas panchayat with a population of about 22,000 is a largely Muslim-dominated area in Jani Khurd block of Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh. Although it is identified as one of polio "hot-spots", there is no Anganwadi worker or ASHA. The entire onus of mobilising the 3700 odd households in the area for health services rests on eight CMCs. Renu Sagar - our Star Mobilizer, is one of them.

Before becoming a CMC, Renu hardly ever stepped out of her house. Nobody in the neighbourhood knew her. But after she joined the SMNet in June 2011, her world changed. A dupatta (scarf) covering her head, the 32-year-old gutsy lady went house-to-house, visiting families and convincing them of the urgency to ensure every child below 5 years receives the oral polio vaccine during every round and gets life saving vaccines under routine immunization. She also counseled them on key hygiene behaviours and how a simple practice of washing hands with soap can prevent diarrhea in children. With her hard work and dedication, Renu soon became a household name. Her sincerity and determination impressed the residents of the area, who persuaded Renu to contest the municipal elections in July 2012. Now Renu shoulders twin responsibilities - that of a Ward Member and a CMC. And none of the 445 households in her area refuse polio vaccination or routine immunization.

Immunization facilities for children at Shiva brick kiln, Bihar

At Shiva brick kiln, near Khagaria in Bihar, a sign has been painted announcing a routine immunization session. The SMNet Block Mobilization Coordinator Mukesh Kumar visits the brick kiln regularly, prepares a 'due list' of children under five years and shares it with local health officials. "Earlier there was no routine immunization for children," says Gulab Devi. "Now the ANM comes once a month and vaccinates our children". There is also a small school where 25 students get basic primary education. 12-year-old Gulshan Kumar who studies at the school says, "When I grow up I want to be a teacher." This follows successful intervention by the SMNet in Khagaria, to ensure children at brick kilns are reached with routine immunization services.



Gulshan Kumar (circled) with other children at Shiva brick kiln in Khagaria, Bihar.

QUOTABLE

"What we have achieved in the country is historic. The goal of eradicating the disease is now within reach. We now need to strengthen and focus our strategy in endemic regions to finish off this final battle towards a polio-free India."

Deepak Kapur

Chairman

Rotary International's India National Polio Plus Committee

POLIO FACTS

- So far in 2013, 16 wild poliovirus cases have been reported from Pakistan (5), Afghanistan (1) and Nigeria (10). This compares to 40 cases reported from these 3 countries and Chad for the corresponding period last year.
- In 2012, 223 cases were reported globally from 5 countries - Pakistan (58), Afghanistan (37), Nigeria (122), Chad (5) and Niger (1).