

# **Editorial** Polio Eradication is the Top Priority of Pakistan Government

**Azhar Masud Bhatti**  
Editor in Chief

President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari has reiterated that eradication of Polio is the foremost priority of the government.

The President was talking to a delegation comprising representatives of international partners against polio eradication which called on him in Aiwan-e-Sadar, Islamabad.

The President said we have made polio eradication campaign a cross party issue and all the political parties and societal forces are now supporting the cause.

Referring to the situation in the tribal areas and some parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the President said that the Government was making efforts with the support of political and religious leaders and other notables of the areas to reach out even in those areas where inaccessibility and security issues had hampered polio campaigns in the past.

The President thanked the international community for complementing the government's efforts to save our children from the menace of polio. He said that the government, the people and the children of Pakistan are also thankful to all our international partners who were providing every assistance in the complete elimination of this disease.

Spokesperson to the President Senator Farhatullah Babar said that the current situation with regards to reported Polio cases in various parts of the country, steps taken for its eradication and the issues involved in fighting the disease were discussed during the meeting.

The meeting was informed that the National Emergency Action Plan (NEAP) adopted focused on greater ownership, oversight and accountability mechanism at the Federal, Provincial, District and grass root levels besides strategies to ensure access into the security sensitive areas. The meeting was informed that the Action Plan was being implemented with vigor with the assistance of all stake holders.

It was informed that campaign quality has witnessed significant improvement in its reach out to the children especially that of the far flung and inaccessible areas and Polio reach out has extended to 80 percent districts of the country with 95 percent coverage. The meeting was further informed that the number of polio cases this year as compared to the last have decreased considerably.

The President while appreciating the assistance and interest of the international partners in complementing the Government's efforts reiterated that eradication of Polio was the foremost priority of the Government. He said that we have made Polio eradication campaign a

cross party issue and all the political parties and societal forces were now supporting the cause.

Discussing Polio situation in tribal areas and some parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the President said that the Government was making efforts with the support of political and religious leaders and other notables of the areas to reach out even in those areas where inaccessibility and security issues had hampered polio eradication campaigns in the past.

During the meeting, the President also telephoned Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman and requested him to meet the delegation to discuss issues related to resistance in Polio campaign by some on ideological grounds.

For this purpose Special Polio teams had been constituted. It was informed that 56 transit points have been established to reach these children.

It may be recalled that the President while chairing a meeting on Polio eradication in October had advised the provincial governments and the concerned authorities to consider setting up permanent booths at all transit points of the provinces. He gave this direction when his attention of the meeting was drawn towards the fact that migration of people was also a major reasons for many children being left unattended during the polio vaccination campaigns.

The President thanked the international community for complementing the Government's efforts to save our children from the menace of Polio. He said that the Government, the people and the children of Pakistan were thankful to all our international partners who were providing every assistance including the development of eradication policies, implementation of the plans of action, providing training materials and public information and much more to help the Government in complete elimination of this disease from the country.

Recently, 11 (Eleven) people were killed in Karachi and KP in well planned attacks. These hits weren't being carried out against military/police/security units, but against health workers working under the WHO's anti-polio drive. The programme has since then been suspended. It doesn't help that nations like Sudan have managed to rid their people of polio, but Pakistan still struggles alongside countries like Nigeria and Afghanistan.

Recently Bargeeta Almby, a 71-year-old Swedish aid worker, was shot in Lahore. She was immediately flown to Sweden for medical attention where she eventually died. The lady had been in Pakistan for over 38 years, and the organisation she worked under dealt with adult literacy, provided technical training and ran

orphanages. The authorities are yet to find any leads on who killed her. And at the heart of all our problems it isn't the masses that are ignorant or illiterate that one can blame, it's the educated liberals and elitists that tell you nothing significantly different than what an uneducated person would go about spouting.

Around May of this year we managed to shut down the entire operation of the Red Cross in the country as well. A doctor with the Red Cross was brutally murdered by decapitation, following which over 900 of the Red Cross staff were put on leave, over 80 foreign staffers were shipped off to Islamabad or out of Pakistan. It is no wonder that the widespread reaction to Pakistan's appeal for aid during the 2010 floods was met with a dire lack of interest, concern and care on part of the

international community. At the end of the day, most look at Pakistan and weigh their own jeopardised wellbeing against those they're trying to help.

The killing of anti Polio workers casts a dark shadow over the future immunization campaigns in Pakistan and poses a challenge to the state.

The politicians and the civil military bureaucracy cannot afford to let the country slip into the hands of the out of control non-state actors that they once created.

This is the time to stand up and reject those who want to cripple out younger generations and this could only be achieved by combined efforts of whole community along with all Government machinery.