

24 October 2018

Asalam-aleikum, dear friends and colleagues:

Subject: Appreciation for Bold Steps Taken to Protect Somali Children against Polio

On 24 October, people around the world are coming together for World Polio Day. In Somalia, we have come together, and write to you to recognize the bold steps that you take every single day to rid Somalia of the poliovirus. Thank you for the work you are doing to keep our children safe from the incurable paralysis caused by polio; and for the incredible efforts you are making day in, day out to stop this outbreak.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative marks its **30-year anniversary** this year. Over the last 21 years, we have built a strong network across Somalia together, fighting polio whenever a virus appeared. We fought it in 2000, when the first case of wild poliovirus was confirmed in Somalia, and again in 2005, 2008 and 2013. Each time, working together, we stopped each outbreak.

Since 2013, the polio programme in Somalia has provided close to 78 million doses of oral polio vaccine to children. None of this would be possible without our incredible workforce. But our work is not over.

Late in 2017, Somalia detected a strain of poliovirus in Mogadishu. Through careful surveillance, we have found children who can no longer walk because of this outbreak.

Somalia is fighting back against this outbreak, and we want to thank the people who are leading the journey.

Thank you to the frontline workers who find every child, even those on the move or who are hard to reach, who make sure families know what they need to do to protect their children. Thanks to those who knock on every door to deliver vaccines; to the technical experts processing data and counting missed children so that we can make sure they don't slip through the net. Thank you to all those who support these frontline teams from behind the scenes to make their challenging work a little easier.

Thank you to the parents, doctors, nurses, vaccinators and volunteers who look out for children with the symptoms of polio and make sure they are tested for the poliovirus.

Thank you to the Government and health authorities of Somalia, who have the health of Somali children at the heart of their work.

Thank you to the Islamic scholars and *Imams*, who help Somali families understand the importance of vaccination.

Thank you to our donors, whose support ensures that all of this work can continue.

Most of all, thank you to Somali parents and caregivers, who welcome us into their homes and trust us to vaccinate their children.

World Polio Day is a chance for us to celebrate how far we have come in the journey to put an end to the paralysis of children by polio. It is also a chance to come together and recommit to finishing the job so that our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren never have to fear polio again. Somalia was the last resting place of smallpox; let us pull together to ensure it is not the last country with polio as well.



Together, we make one team working for the health of our children – the future of Somalia. The work of each and every one of you is so necessary, and is making history as we take the world closer to the finishing line of eradication. Please stay with us as we work to reach every child in Somalia with the life-saving polio vaccine.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "G. Popal", with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Ghulam Popal
WHO Representative
Somalia

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Lauwerier", with a horizontal line underneath.

Steven Lauwerier
UNICEF Representative
Somalia