

25 October 2019, Geneva, Switzerland

My fellow Polio Eradicators,

Yesterday was World Polio Day, a global awareness-raising day on the need to complete the job of polio eradication, and here at the World Health Organization (WHO) headquarters, it was my great honour to make a truly phenomenal announcement: that wild poliovirus type 3 has been certified as globally eradicated, by the Global Commission for the Certification of Poliomyelitis Eradication.

This is the second of the three types of wild poliovirus to have been globally eradicated. Only wild poliovirus type 1 remains in circulation, in just two countries worldwide. Africa has not detected any wild poliovirus of any type since September 2016, and the entire African Region is eligible to be certified free of all wild poliovirus next June.

Global wild poliovirus type 3 eradication is a tremendous achievement and is an important milestone on the road to eradicate all poliovirus strains. This shows us that the tactics are working, as individual family lines of the virus are being successfully knocked out.

But the job is not finished until ALL strains of poliovirus are fully eradicated – and stay eradicated. We must achieve final success or face the consequences of renewed global resurgence of this ancient scourge. We must eradicate the remaining strains of WPV1 and also address the increasing circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus outbreaks, in particular in Africa.

And here too we are making strong inroads. New strategies are helping us reach the most vulnerable populations, particularly in the remaining reservoir areas. New tools, including a brand-new vaccine, are being developed, to ensure the long-term risk of vaccine-derived polioviruses can be comprehensively addressed.

But these tools and tactics only work if they are fully funded, and fully implemented.

And so today, on the day after this tremendous announcement, I really have two messages for you.

The first is a simple and whole-hearted ‘thank you’. Thank you for making a world free of wild poliovirus type 3 a reality. Thank you to all countries, to all donors, to all stakeholders, partners, advisory and oversight groups, policy makers, Rotarians. Most importantly, thank you to all communities, to all parents. To all frontline health workers. They are the real heroes of this achievement.

And my second message is: please do not stop now. The Reaching the Last Mile Forum, hosted in the United Arab Emirates this November by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, will provide an opportunity for many of our stakeholders to recommit their efforts to a polio-free world. I urge all of you to stay committed and redouble determination in this final push to the finish line.

Together, the partners of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) - WHO, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance – stand ready to support this global effort. But it will take collective and global collaboration, from all public- and private-sector stakeholders, to ensure every last child is reached and protected from all polioviruses.

Together, let us achieve history: let us ensure that no child anywhere will ever again be paralysed by any poliovirus.

Thank you.



Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus
Chair, GPEI Polio Oversight Board
Director-General, WHO