UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S PRESS REMARKS ON POLIO IN GAZA

16 August 2024

PRESS ENCOUNTER

New York, 16 August 2024

Gaza is in a humanitarian freefall.

Just when it seems the situation could not get worse for Palestinians in Gaza, the suffering grows – and the world watches.

In recent weeks, the poliovirus has been detected in wastewater samples in Khan Younis and Deir al-Balah.

That means the virus is now circulating, with hundreds of thousands of children in Gaza at risk.

Polio does not care about dividing lines – and polio does not wait.

Preventing and containing the spread of polio will take a massive, coordinated and urgent effort.

The United Nations is poised to launch a vital polio vaccine campaign in Gaza for more than [640,000] children under the age of 10.

The World Health Organization has approved the release of 1.6 million doses of the polio vaccine.

UNICEF is coordinating delivery of the vaccines and the cold chain equipment to store them.

And UNRWA, the largest primary healthcare provider in Gaza, has medical teams ready to administer the vaccines and assist with logistics.

But the challenges are grave.

Health, water, and sanitation systems in Gaza have been decimated.

The majority of hospitals and primary care facilities are not functional.

People are constantly on the run for safety.

And routine immunizations have been severely disrupted by the conflict, increasing the spread of other preventable diseases like measles and polio.

We know how an effective polio vaccination campaign must be administered.

Given the wholesale devastation in Gaza, at least 95 per cent vaccination coverage will be needed during each round of the two-round campaign to prevent polio's spread and reduce its emergence.

The vaccination effort will include 708 teams at hospitals and primary health care centres – many of which are barely functioning -- and by 316 community outreach teams throughout Gaza.

And we also know what a successful campaign will require:

The facilitation of transport for vaccines and cold chain equipment at every step.

The entry of polio experts into Gaza.

Fuel for health teams to conduct their work.

Reliable internet and phone services to inform communities about the campaign.

An increase in the amount of cash allowed into Gaza to pay health workers.

And, above all, a successful polio vaccination campaign needs safety.

Safety for health workers to do their jobs.

Safety for children and families to get to the health facilities.

And safety for those health facilities to be protected from bombardment.

I am appealing to all parties to provide concrete assurances right away guaranteeing humanitarian pauses for the campaign.

Let's be clear: The ultimate vaccine for polio is peace and an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

But in any case, a Polio Pause is a must.

It is impossible to conduct a polio vaccination campaign with war raging all over.

Polio goes beyond politics.

It transcends all divisions.

And so it is our shared obligation to come together.

To mobilize – not to fight people, but to fight polio.

And to defeat a vicious virus that, left unchecked, would have a disastrous [illegible] not only for Palestinian children in Gaza, but also in neighbouring [illegible]es and the region.

Thank you.

> Q: When do you want this humanitarian pause for polio to begin?

SG: First of all, ideally, we need a ceasefire. In a situation in which a ceasefire is not in place, there is a plan. For the implementation of that plan, we need a pause and that requires of course an agreement between the parties.

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The statement is accessible on the website of the United Nations Secretary-General here (https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2024-08-16/secretary-generals-press-encounter-polio-gaza-scroll-down-for-arabic-version?_gl=1*vn8ojo*_ga*NDcyNTM2Nzg2LjE3MTc0MTMyNTM.*_ga_S5EKZKSB78*M

Background Information:

UNRWA (https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.unrwa.org%2F&data=05%7C01%7CHQ-PIO%40UNRWA.ORG%7C7edfcbc8399c400e4a6c08dafba2254d%7C262f6a4120e941408d3efdf the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The United Nations General Assembly established UNRWA in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations pending a just and lasting solution to their plight.

UNRWA operates in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, The Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Tens of thousands of Palestine refugees who lost their homes and livelihoods due to the 1948 conflict continue to be displaced and in need of support, nearly 75 years on.

UNRWA helps Palestine Refugees achieve their full potential in human development through quality services it provides in education, health care, relief and social services, protection, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance, and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.

Your support is crucial to help us provide emergency aid (https://bit.ly/3rXMZ0P) to displaced families in Gaza (https://bit.ly/3rXMZ0P)



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