

**Draft Joint statement of the WEOG Regional Group**  
**First Regular Session 2024 of the UNICEF Executive Board**  
**Special Focus Session on the Eradication of Polio**

Mr/Madam President, dear colleagues,

- I deliver this statement on behalf of all WEOG countries and the European Union as a donor.
- Together, we have pursued the vision of a polio-free world with unfaltering commitment and perseverance. Even in these trying times, we cannot lose sight of **our goal to eradicate polio**.
- We must finish the job: Because **until eradication is achieved, recurrence of the virus** in countries that are polio-free **remains possible**.
- The COVID-19 pandemic caused painful **setbacks**. In 2023, we were not able to interrupt all infection chains. Still, we made progress in delivering vaccines that protect against polio. **Our goal remains within reach**.
- Jointly, as a **global community**, we have taken up the fight for polio eradication. The **Global Polio Eradication Initiative - GPEI** - is a vivid example of successful multilateral collaboration: many sovereign states and core partners work together in this special **multi-stakeholder coalition** with the **common goal to end the disease**. Many **WEOG countries** are crucial partners of this initiative. My own country, Germany, as well as many other countries associating to this statement, have been a strong partner in the fight against polio for more than 30 years.
- **As a result of GPEI's work, since 1988, polio cases have decreased by more than 99% globally. The virus is now endemic in only two countries.** This is a huge success.
- To build on this success, we need to **ensure that GPEI is adequately resourced to deliver on its strategy to realise a future world without polio**.

In this context, we would also like to warmly **welcome the European Commission** as a new member to the GPEI donor group.

- Unfortunately, despite our progress, there are still too many **“zero-dose” and under-immunized children** who have never received any vaccines, including for polio, especially, but not only in fragile and conflict settings. To reach these children, we have to **join forces and pool expertise**. We need to **intensify the partnership** between GPEI and other key immunization stakeholders such as Gavi, while also strengthening our cooperation with humanitarian actors. We also need improved coordination with GAVI, HA, Expanded Program of Immunization (EPI) birth-dose, and other programs to sustain access and community support.
- We **commend UNICEF** for driving global advocacy for polio eradication, for building trust with communities, and for delivering more than half of global oral polio vaccines – including in the toughest and hardest to reach places.
- **Women** have a **crucial role in our fight against polio**. Women already lead the way as frontline workers and caregivers. We need to continue our work to **expand women’s roles as programme managers, leaders in health and as global champions**.
- Finally, allow me to briefly glance into a future without polio: **Infrastructure** that has been set up for the fight against polio is now a **major asset in many countries**. Let us ensure that current monitoring and surveillance systems have **sustainable, national financing** in place, even after a successful eradication of polio, so that they can continue their work for the health of children and their communities.
- **Ladies and Gentleman, a future without polio is within reach**. We have already achieved so much. Let us stay on course and together save children's lives by eradicating polio.