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## IPA Statement on the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the South-East Asia on agenda 9.2 Challenges in Polio Eradication

### Challenges in Polio Eradication: Insights from the International Pediatric Association

The International Pediatric Association (IPA) is deeply committed to the global effort to eradicate polio. As an organization consisting of pediatricians and child health professionals from around the world, the IPA has closely observed and actively participated in addressing the challenges faced in polio eradication campaigns.

**Vaccine Delivery and Accessibility:** One of the primary challenges in polio eradication is ensuring universal access to the polio vaccine. In many areas, particularly in remote and conflict-affected regions, reaching children with the vaccine is difficult. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure, logistical challenges, and vaccine hesitancy among caregivers pose significant obstacles to successful vaccination campaigns.

**Vaccine-Derived Poliovirus (VDPV) Outbreaks:** While the oral polio vaccine (OPV) has been instrumental in drastically reducing polio cases, it carries a rare but critical risk of causing vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV) outbreaks. VDPV outbreaks occur when the weakened vaccine-virus circulates within an under-immunized population, leading to cases of paralysis. Managing and containing VDPV outbreaks is a complex task, requiring robust surveillance, proactive immunization campaigns, and targeted public health interventions.

**Conflict and Insecurity:** Polio eradication efforts are notably hampered by insecurity and conflict in certain regions. These conditions can disrupt vaccination campaigns, compromise the safety of healthcare workers, and limit access to vulnerable populations. The IPA recognizes the need for ongoing humanitarian efforts, coordination with security forces, and the engagement of local communities to ensure safe and effective immunization in conflict-affected areas.

**Vaccine Hesitancy and Misinformation:** Vaccine hesitancy, fueled by misinformation and distrust, poses a significant challenge to polio eradication efforts. Misconceptions about the safety and efficacy of vaccines, cultural beliefs, and the spread of false information through social media platforms contribute to vaccine hesitancy. The IPA underscores the importance of public education campaigns, fostering trust in healthcare systems, and working closely with community leaders and influencers to address these concerns.



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**Surveillance and Response:** Sustained and robust surveillance systems are vital for early detection and response to polio outbreaks. Weak surveillance infrastructure, limited laboratory capacity, and inadequate data reporting hinder the timely identification and containment of poliovirus transmission. The IPA advocates for strengthening surveillance systems, expanding laboratory networks, and enhancing data sharing and analysis to ensure effective monitoring and response.

**Woefully Underfunded Programs:** The eradication of polio requires substantial financial resources. Despite commendable efforts by global health organizations and governments, funding gaps persist, impeding progress. The IPA calls for increased investment in polio eradication, particularly in countries where the disease remains endemic, to sustain immunization campaigns, surveillance activities, and health system strengthening efforts.

As staunch advocates for child health, the International Pediatric Association recognizes the significant challenges inherent in polio eradication. The barriers to achieving a polio-free world are multifaceted, encompassing vaccine access and delivery, addressing vaccine-derived outbreaks, conflict and insecurity, vaccine hesitancy, surveillance and response, and underfunding. The IPA urges global collaboration, increased resource allocation, and collective commitment to overcoming these challenges, so that every child can be safeguarded against this devastating disease. By continuing our collective efforts, guided by evidence and collaboration, we can eradicate polio and safeguard the health of future generations.