First meeting of the GPEI Independent Monitoring Board

The new Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) convened its inaugural orientation meeting on 21–22 December 2010 in Geneva, Switzerland. The IMB was established at the request of the Executive Board of WHO and the World Health Assembly in 2010, to monitor the implementation and impact of the new Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) Strategic Plan 2010–2012, against the major milestones and process indicators established for that purpose, and advise countries and partner agencies on corrective actions as appropriate.

The focus of the IMB's deliberations at this first orientation meeting was threefold: (i) establishing the IMB's method of work; (ii) assessing the status (as at December 2010) of the GPEI Strategic Plan 2010–2012 milestones and process indicators; (iii) discussing the emergency action plans of Pakistan, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the Minister of Health and senior health authorities from each country. This report summarizes the work of the IMB in each of these areas.

1. IMB working methods:

The IMB decided that it will meet on a quarterly basis, usually at WHO headquarters in Geneva, with a minimum of 6 of the group's 9 members constituting a quorum. Meetings will follow a flexible format, depending on programme priorities, the evolving epidemiology of poliovirus, and issues of concern to the IMB. Recognizing the need to share rapidly its findings with key stakeholders, the IMB will endeavour to summarize its initial perspectives with interested parties through a telephone-conference at the end of each meeting. Final meeting reports will be presented within 14 days of each meeting to the heads of agencies of the GPEI spearheading partner agencies, WHO, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF, and to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The reports will also be provided to Ministers of Health of affected countries, funding agencies and other interested parties, made available at http://www.polioeradication.org, and published in the *Weekly Epidemiological Record*. The final method of work of the IMB will be published at http://www.polioeradication.org.

2. Status of GPEI Strategic Plan 2010–2012 milestones and process indicators:

Progress against each of the major milestones of the GPEI Strategic Plan 2010–2012 at 21 December 2010 was as follows:

i. Countries with polio outbreaks due to an imported poliovirus: of the 15 countries which experienced an outbreak due to a new importation in 2009, none had detected polio cases due to that importation since mid-2010. In the 11 countries in which there had been new outbreaks in 2010, no outbreak had persisted for longer than 6 months; however, efforts were still ongoing to address the recent-onset outbreaks in the Republic of Congo, on the Uganda/Kenya border, in the
Russian Federation, and in Chad, which was affected by a new importation of wild poliovirus type 1 in September 2010.

ii. Countries with re-established poliovirus transmission: the re-established wild poliovirus type 1 in southern Sudan had not been detected since 27 June 2009 and the re-established wild poliovirus type 3 in Chad had not been detected since 10 May 2010. 1 Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were at risk of becoming “off track” due to ongoing transmission of the re-establishment of wild poliovirus during the 4th quarter of 2010.

iii. Countries with indigenous polioviruses: overall, in the 4 remaining endemic countries, cases had declined by 82% in 2010 compared to the same period in 2009 (as of February 2011). In Nigeria, cases had declined by 95%, in India by 95% and in Afghanistan by 35%. Pakistan was at risk of becoming “off track” because of a 61% increase in the number of polio cases.

The IMB will next review progress against each of the milestones at its next meeting on 31 March 2011.

3. Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Pakistan:

Recognizing the risks to the relevant Strategic Plan milestones in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Pakistan, the IMB invited the Ministers of Health of these countries to participate in this first orientation meeting of the IMB. In keeping with the goals of the GPEI Strategic Plan 2010–2012, all 3 countries had initiated the establishment of a new or updated emergency plan to address urgently the gaps in programme implementation. The IMB was presented with the main elements of these plans by the Ministers of Health of Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Director-General for Health of Pakistan. The IMB encouraged the rapid finalization and introduction of the emergency plan in each country and welcomed their close oversight by the respective Head of State to facilitate successful implementation.

The IMB requested a summary report on progress against each of these plans at its March 2011 meeting and at subsequent meetings until such time as these countries' polio eradication efforts are deemed to be back on track.

---

1 Since the December 2010 meeting of the IMB, a new case due to a wild poliovirus type 3 has been detected in Chad (with onset of paralysis on 23 December 2010), and is under investigation. If genetic sequencing of this virus demonstrates it is due to ongoing transmission of the re-established virus, the IMB may determine that the country be considered 'off track' for achieving its end-2010 milestone.