



Government of Japan commits \$12 million to help eradicate polio and prevent the spread of other vaccine preventable diseases in Afghanistan

KABUL, 9 February, 2014 – The Government of Japan, one of the biggest international donors to development in Afghanistan, has pledged to continue and strengthen its support to the country's children and women by committing 1.18 billion Japanese Yen (approximately \$12 million) to efforts to eradicate polio and prevent the spread of other vaccine preventable diseases. His Excellency Hiroshi Takahashi, the Ambassador of Japan, and UNICEF Afghanistan Representative, Akhil Iyer, today signed the agreement in the presence of Her Excellency, Minister of Public Health, Dr. Suraya Dalil. The agreement spans a period of 12 months, and will be implemented in coordination with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

His Excellency, Ambassador Takahashi noted that the Government of Japan has consistently supported efforts to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in Afghanistan, especially polio. "We are pleased to see the progress that has been made in health in Afghanistan in recent years. We are now closer today than ever before to eradicating polio once and for all, from Afghanistan and from the world. 2014 is a key transition year for Afghanistan. Despite the challenging environment, it is important that Japan stays committed to finishing the fight against polio and other preventable diseases to save the lives of mother and children and to build a healthier and more peaceful Afghanistan," said the Ambassador.

Expressing thanks on behalf of the Government and people of Afghanistan, Her Excellency, Dr. Dalil said, "We in the Ministry of Public Health are committed to the polio eradication initiative in the country. Polio eradication is one of the top priorities of mine in the Ministry of Public Health. In this regard considerable progress is made. However, in order to eradicate polio, these efforts need to be sustained for protecting Afghan children against the crippling disease." said the Minister.

The project aims to reduce child mortality through increased Routine Immunization coverage. It will also support measles control efforts and be a major contribution to global polio eradication efforts, with the ultimate goal of halting the circulation of the polio virus in Afghanistan.

Receiving the grant on behalf of UNICEF, Akhil Iyer, UNICEF Afghanistan Representative, highlighted the importance of routine immunization and the eradication of polio. "We truly are at the brink of interrupting the circulation of the virus in Afghanistan. What we now need is timely and high quality implementation of the national Emergency Action Plan for Polio Eradication; we need to focus on strengthening routine immunization coverage; and - now more than ever - we need the continued support of our long-standing partners. For this reason, I am particularly grateful for the renewed commitment by the Government of Japan and for the on-going generosity of the people of Japan," he said.

Japan has consistently been a major contributor to polio eradication efforts across the world and, in Afghanistan, all routine immunization vaccines are procured with its support. This commitment by the Government and people of Japan has been critical in enabling the expansion of polio eradication efforts and strengthening the national routine immunization system in Afghanistan over the past few years, led by the Ministry of Public Health, with technical support from UNICEF, WHO and other partners.

For More Information:

UNICEF:

Alistair Gretarsson, UNICEF, agretarsson@unicef.org; Tel: 079 850 7110

Aziz Froutan, UNICEF, aafroutan@unicef.org; Tel: 079 850 7113

Ministry of Public Health:

Dr Kaneshka, Tel: 079 915 9151

Embassy of Japan in Afghanistan:

Ms. Ayako Ito, ayako.ito@mofa.go.jp

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Afghanistan Office:

Mr Nobuhiro Kawatani, Kawatani.Nobuhiro@jica.go.jp



Ambassador Takahashi is giving a polio vaccine as a demonstration.