

**OPENING REMARKS AT THE 18TH EXPERT REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING
IN KADUNA**

BY

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PROTOCOLS

It is a great privilege and honour to welcome you to this 18th Meeting of the Expert Review Committee focusing on Polio Eradication and Immunization here in Kaduna. The ERC remains one of the most important sources of independent advice and monitoring of the national immunization program, implemented by the National Primary Health Care Development Agency. The last ERC meeting was held in Ota, Ogun State in early April 2009. We welcome all partners from Nigeria and abroad, including WHO Geneva, CDC Atlanta, USAID Abuja, UNICEF, Bill Gates Foundation and of course, our own Chair of the ERC Prof. Tomori. I wish to also recognize the Chairman of the NPHCDA Governing Board HRH Emir of Shonga, Dr. Halliru Yahaya.

This meeting comes at a critical juncture in the Nigerian immunization program. To understand why this time is critical one need to look at the recent history of the polio eradication efforts. Last year by this time Nigeria was in the middle of a raging upsurge of wild polio transmission and actively exporting viruses to other countries. The international community at the World Health Assembly in May 2008 in Geneva singled out Nigeria, particularly northern Nigeria, for open rebuke due to the ongoing upsurge of wild polio transmission. There were concerns that Nigeria threatened to reverse the international gains in efforts to eradicate polio out of this world.

In the last 9-12 months we have witnessed a transformation of the polio control environment in this country. It started with Mr. President's well known statement to do whatever is humanly possible to eradicate polio out of Nigeria. Several political leaders joined hands and federal Government further injected its own resources to bolster the fight against polio. In January 2009, the first meeting of the Governors Forum of the federation focused on polio eradication and primary health care. Mr. Bill Gates Jr. visit to Nigeria in February provided

opportunity for Governors to recommit themselves through the Abuja Declaration signed in Abuja. With Federal Government and State Governors on board the program proceeded to engage with religious and traditional leaders. In June 2009 HE Sultan of Sokoto chaired a meeting of Northern Traditional Leaders here in Kaduna focusing on polio and primary health care. Subsequently the Northern Traditional Leaders Committee on Primary health Care Delivery was formed and its members are drawn from all the 19 northern States where the polio problem was severe. The convergence of leaders, spiritual as well as temporal, resulted in formidable mobilization of Nigerians bringing their children to be vaccinated.

There is now clear evidence of progress in Nigeria's efforts to eradicate polio. We are immunizing more children with potent and safe vaccines. The number of Nigerian children paralyzed by polio virus so far this year 2009 is almost half of what it was in 2008. So, we have saved hundreds of children from needless paralysis, disability and death as a result of the wild polio virus. Alongside this progress on polio we have trained health workers, mobilized communities, delivered other interventions such as measles vaccines and Vitamin A supplements and many pluses to women and children all over Nigeria. The Federal Government is proud of its achievements so far in the polio program. These achievements were made possible only by the genuine partnership with State Governments and Traditional Leaders in a cause the bears hope for present and future generations of Nigerian children.


Despite this progress, important challenges remain. There are persisting gaps in polio campaign operations particularly at the LGAs. Some State Governors and several LG Chairmen are yet to put their full weights behind the program and Routine Immunization coverage is low. Parents in some areas still do not understand the important benefit of the vaccines and are misinformed. Above all, those of us in the program risk becoming complacent seeing the progress we have made. It is for these reasons that I say that the 18th ERC is coming at a critical juncture.

We look to your global, regional and national expertise to advice us on how best to sustain the recent gains and close the gaps in our program. Specific questions that the ERC may help us answer: (a) when can the program reasonably expect polio transmission to stop—by geography and serotype—based on the ERC's

recommended SIA schedule (timing and antigens)? (b) What are the options for use of the bivalent vaccine and best plan for Nigeria based on available evidence? (c) What amount of vaccine activity will be required to stop all three types of the polio viruses? (d) What concrete steps do we take to strengthen RI while pursuing the SIAs? (e) How do we keep the polio Free states the same way? These and other questions are left for experts like you to answer. We look to your advice.

Immunization remains one of the most cost-effective public health interventions. It saves lives and prevents unnecessary deaths. In the short term we'll continue with campaigns while at same time rebuilding our primary health care system so that it becomes the platform for delivery of integrated health services to our people. Rebuilding our primary health care system will not be cheap, but it will surely deliver better essential health services to help us achieve the MDGs. In these efforts, we cannot relent and failure is not an option.

As the ERC gets underway, we wish you productive deliberations. Thank you!


**UPDATE ON
GOVERNORS COMMITMENTS
TO POLIO ERADICATION
IN NIGERIA**
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- ### Outline
- Overview of Abuja Commitments
 - Interim Report on the Implementation of the Abuja commitments, May-August 2009
 - Trends in Quality of Immunization Campaigns
 - Conclusion
 - Issues for consideration

