

WHO, BILL GATES AND ISLAMIC SCHOLARS ALL PUSH FOR POLIO VACCINATION IN PROVINCE NOW GOVERNED BY KHAN'S PTI

There are public calls on a remarkable number of different fronts for a renewed commitment to polio vaccination in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, which is now governed by Imran Khan's PTI party. Direct appeals to Khan are coming from the World Health Organization and from Bill Gates. A major conference of Islamic scholars also came out with a statement backing polio immunization and providing push-back against the view that immunization campaigns aim to sterilize Muslims or are run by Western intelligence agencies.

Dawn gives us the details of the WHO push:

World Health Organisation, Pakistan polio chief Dr Elias Durray on Thursday apprised Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf chairman Imran Khan in Lahore of the threat to the health of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa children due to non-vaccination, it is learned. PTI, which has the most seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, leads a coalition government in the province.

According to the relevant officials, the meeting has coincided with the confirmation of three fresh polio cases from Federally Administered Tribal Areas by National Institute of Health.

They said Fata had reported five, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa four and Sindh two of this

year's 13 countrywide polio cases.

Khan is eager to help in the campaign and has taken part in promoting immunization before his party was elected to govern KP:

The officials said WHO had publicly recorded its reservations about polio eradication efforts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially in Peshawar.

They said the PTI chairman, who had inaugurated various polio campaigns in the country's several cities, apprised the WHO, Pakistan polio chief of his eagerness to see fight against polio succeed.

The officials said Imran Khan carefully listened to Dr Elias Durray's concerns about Khyber Pakhtunkhwa children's vaccination and assured him that he would convey them to the PTI-led provincial government for necessary action on emergency basis.

"Imran Khan said he would issue special instructions to the provincial chief minister (who belongs to PTI) to ensure vaccination of all children under five as ensuring better health care in the province is his government's top priority," an official said.

Also joining the push for immunization is Bill Gates, as we learn from the Express Tribune:

Famous American business magnate Bill Gates has sought Imran Khan's cooperation to eradicate polio in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, as the province apparently failed to provide security to polio workers.

Gates sent a personal letter through his emissary to chairman Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PT) Imran Khan asking for his party's cooperation in furthering the

anti polio vaccination programme in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said an official statement.

Imran Khan is scheduled to speak to him on the phone to discuss modalities of moving against polio which takes the lives of so many children in Pakistan especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Especially welcome news comes from a meeting held by Islamic scholars who produced a statement in favor of immunization and condemning the killing of vaccination workers. They also condemned Dr. Shakil Afridi and any other participation of intelligence agencies in vaccination programs:

Declaring the killing of polio workers 'un-Islamic' and 'inhumane', speakers at the Ulema conference on Thursday also held Dr Shakeel Afridi responsible for the murder of polio workers and for depriving 260,000 children of polio drops.

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They declared Dr Afridi a traitor and urged the government to pursue litigation against him for causing irreparable damage to the polio vaccination programme, particularly in the FATA region.

The scholars also strongly condemned the brutal killings and urged the government to investigate into the matter, find the culprits behind the killing of polio workers and compensate the families of the victims.

Pakistan Ulema Council chairman Maulana Tahir Ashrafi read out the Islamabad Declaration – a pledge to ensure a healthy future for the Muslim children.

On behalf of all the participating scholars, Ashrafi expressed concern over

the reported cases of polio in certain parts of Pakistan.

Gosh, if only there were a call here in the US for litigation against Leon Panetta for leaking Afridi's involvement in the vaccination ruse to match the Pakistani call for litigation against Afridi.

Especially important is the call for local religious leaders to urge cooperation with the vaccinations:

Dr Atta Ur Rehman, president of the Inter-Faith Religious Council, Quetta, read the second part of the declaration stating that all efforts would be made to convey a strong and effective message to parents to vaccinate their children.

The participation of religious leaders at district and union council levels will be ensured to support anti-polio drives and they will be motivated to play an active role in disseminating the message.

These are very welcome developments that are essential if polio is to be eradicated from Pakistan.