

## Remarks by Dr. Kerri-Ann Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, at a High Level Meeting on the Implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for Small Island Developing States

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Thank you for that kind introduction.

Many of you here today have devoted much time and effort to improving health around the world, and specifically to combating polio. In particular, I would like to recognize the dedication of national ministries of health, Rotary International, the World Health Organization, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We deeply appreciate your work that of your colleagues and the organizations you represent. Without your contributions, we would not be as close as we are to eradicating polio.

And I would also like to express my thanks to UNICEF and the United Nations Foundation for helping to bring this group together and their tireless commitment to polio eradication.

During his groundbreaking speech in Cairo on June 4, 2009, President Obama announced that the OIC and the U.S. will work together to advance our shared goal of eradicating polio. We have started down that path by bringing together a focused and determined community in December 2009 to launch the OIC-US joint initiative on polio. In addition, the U.S. and the OIC have raised polio eradication in both bilateral and multilateral fora to continue to highlight the importance of polio eradication. Just last week in his speech at the UN General Assembly on MDGs, President Obama stated, "We are working with partners to finally eradicate polio."

Today, I am here to discuss achievements made by the United States and the OIC, in partnership, standing up to the threat of polio. But I will also highlight the continuing needs for combating this disease.

For thousands of years, polio has been endemic. Only in 1955, when Dr. Jonas Salk developed the first vaccine against polio, was the world able to imagine a future without the dreaded disease. Dr. Albert Sabin's oral polio vaccine, produced five years later, gave us a second weapon against the disease, and opened a door to eradication. In the United States, the last case of polio caused by a wild poliovirus was reported in the late 1970s.

Thanks to the leadership and generosity of international institutions and numerous national governments, we have achieved considerable success. We are "this close" to the goal of final eradication but we also recognize the fragility of this progress. This last push will require renewed international commitment, cooperation and community involvement and that is why we are here working together in partnership to advance our shared goal of eradicating polio.

We must encourage persistence, reinvigorate political and technical attention in the face of a disappearing disease and competing priorities and urgently expand the number of financial and engaged donors, beyond those who have historically found the resources, some of which may be struggling to sustain their prior levels

of support. The U.S. partnership with the OIC provides renewed impetus to this global effort, and has the added benefit of further strengthening the United States' cooperation with Muslim communities around the world on issues of common concern. We urge OIC member countries to engage actively in this historic opportunity to get rid of this devastating virus in the remaining polio-affected regions, many of which are also OIC members.

Our engagement with the OIC and its member countries has been extensive. In May, I traveled with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, to the World Health Assembly in Geneva, where we convened an unprecedented meeting with health ministers from OIC countries, in cooperation with the OIC Secretariat. Experts from the Centers for Disease Control and USAID are in regular and close consultation with the OIC and its member countries enhancing communication and a coordinated strategic response to this disease. Innovative programs like the Stop Transmission of Polio, or "STOP" trainings, are advancing technical capabilities for intra-OIC health worker exchanges.

We appreciate the efforts of GCC Health Ministers who this spring recognized the Global Polio Eradication Campaign as a critical global health initiative and urged its member countries to provide support.

U.S. financial support – both from private donors and from the government – remains strong. The U.S. Government has provided more than \$1.8 billion to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative since 1988, as well as extensive technical support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Additionally, the President announced his Global Health Initiative proposal a \$63 billion interagency effort to improve and expand access to health services for the world's poor, which underscores the U.S. commitment to a comprehensive global health strategy, including polio eradication.

Yet, vaccination campaigns and emergency operations in outbreak areas continue to face funding gaps. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative currently faces an \$810 million funding gap for implementation of its 2010–2012 work plan. While many nations have given generously, other potential donors have yet to fulfill their pledges, or have not given at all. We urge all countries here today to consider ways in which they can increase their technical and financial assistance to help achieve this monumental goal. The OIC and the U.S. will continue to work with our partners to ensure that these resources become available.

For the Obama Administration, the eradication of polio is a key foreign policy objective. We will continue to work with our partners, like the OIC, to provide strong public support and diplomatic leadership to this initiative. Polio is a fully preventable disease, one for which we have had the expertise and technology to address for decades and we are finally this close to the end. Let us move forward and use this opportunity to eradicate this devastating disease.

Thank you.