There has been real progress in eradicating polio from the Eastern Mediterranean Region in 2015. The 2013-2014 polio outbreak in Somalia, which affected nearly 200 people, most of them children, has been officially declared over, 14 months after the last polio case was identified. T his remarkable achievement is the result of the enormous efforts and commitment shown by governments, health workers, and parents to ensure that their children receive the vaccine. In the Middle East, despite continuing conflict, declining immunization rates in conflict affected areas and mass population displacement, the extensive multi-country outbreak response has stopped the outbreak that started in October 2013, and no new polio cases have been reported for over 18 months. In Pakistan, in 2015 case numbers have declined by 80% compared to the same period in 2014. In 2015, only two countries in the world, Pakistan and Afghanistan, have reported wild poliovirus.

"We acknowledge the tremendous efforts by health workers, volunteers, and communities to achieve this progress despite the incredible challenges posed by insecurity and conflict, population movement, and weak health systems," said Dr Ala Alwan, WHO's Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, "but we have a lot of work still to do to finally achieve the eradication of polio in the coming months."

The ongoing poliovirus transmission in Pakistan and Afghanistan remains the greatest challenge to finally achieving the eradication of polio; while poliovirus is circulating anywhere, there is a risk it will be carried into and re-infect polio-free areas. Every country must maintain the highest levels of vigilance and be prepared to respond to any importation of polio.

Dr Alwan said, "Today is World Polio Day. Today WHO reaffirms our commitment to eradicating polio from every country in this Region and in the world, in partnership with our Member States and UNICEF, Rotary International, the Centres for Disease Control, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Together, we will achieve a polio-free world."