SANA'A, 9 April 2017 — In an effort to keep Yemen polio-free, nearly 5 million children under the age of 5 have been vaccinated in a nationwide campaign covering all governorates in the country. The campaign was supported by a partnership between the World Bank, UNICEF and WHO launched in February 2017.

Despite intensifying violence in Sa'ada governorate, more than 369 000 children between the ages of 6 months and 15 years were immunized against measles – a highly contagious and potentially fatal disease - and over 155 000 children under the age of 5 were vaccinated against polio.

Thousands of dedicated health workers, health educators, religious leaders and local council officials played a key role in mobilizing their communities to maximize the immunization campaign's reach. Thanks to their support, high-risk groups, such as internally displaced persons and refugees, have also been vaccinated.

"WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank, are working closely with health authorities to keep Yemen polio-free and curb the spread of measles," said Dr Nevio Zagaria, WHO Representative in Yemen. "This partnership provides continuous support to national health authorities to increase vaccination coverage for vulnerable children across Yemen."

Before 2006, measles was one of the leading causes of death in children under 5 years old in Yemen. But several measles campaigns supported by WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank have succeeded in drastically reducing child deaths from the disease.

The 2 year-long conflict in Yemen has all but destroyed the country's health system, including the national immunization programme to protect all children from preventable diseases. WHO and UNICEF have provided sustained support for the programme, along with other essential health services for children, including:

- Delivering fuel, generators and solar-powered refrigerators to keep vaccines at a constant cool temperature,
- Support for transferring vaccines from national and governorate cold rooms to local health facilities and vaccination teams.

"Every minute, the situation of Yemen's children gets worse. It is unacceptable that children in Yemen are dying of preventable diseases. This is why, together with partners, we are sparing no effort to save more lives," said Ms Meritxell Relaño, UNICEF Representative in Yemen.

"The World Bank is committed to investing in children's health, which is a vital investment in

the country's future, through working with our UN partners in Yemen and strengthening the local health institutions," said Ms Sandra Bloemenkamp, World Bank Country Manager for Yemen.

Immunization campaigns are critical to keep Yemen polio-free – a major priority for WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank – and to help minimize the risk of poliovirus being imported into the country. Vaccination is one of the safest and most cost-effective health interventions to protect children from potentially fatal and debilitating diseases.

http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/nationwide-immunization-campaign-protects-5-million-children-against-polio-in-war-torn-yemen.html