

**United States Remarks for the
UNICEF Executive Board Annual Session
June 1-4, 2021**

Special Focus Session on Global Polio Eradication Initiative

The United States commends the Global Polio Eradication Initiative on its support towards the COVID-19 pandemic response, and the United States fully supports the GPEI and urges all Member States to do what is necessary to free the world from both wild and vaccine-derived polioviruses so that no child will face paralysis from this vaccine preventable disease.

The United States is very concerned about increased wild polio transmission in the remaining endemic countries as well as expanding circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 outbreaks (cVDPV2) in three WHO regions, especially Africa.

The United States is concerned about WHO's recent decision to accelerate the post-eradication transition to January 2022 despite challenging polio epidemiology in several WHO regions. We are particularly concerned about the consequences of the proposed rapid staff reduction in the Africa region. While the U.S. appreciates that WHO cannot continue to have polio operations in over 70 countries, the timing of this action with the current risks posed by vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) outbreaks across Africa places full eradication at risk. WHO and UNICEF share responsibility, and accountability, for achieving and sustaining a polio-free world.

We noted the importance of routine immunization coverage to reduce the risk of cVDPV outbreaks and encourage UNICEF to elevate and reposition routine immunizations as the backbone of primary health care delivery in their COVID-19 response.

The United States also encourages UNICEF to proactively seek and champion integrated immunization campaigns and outreach services, expand evidence-based approaches to vaccine hesitancy, and engage communities for local problem solving.