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The Director-General presents his compliments and has the honour to inform Member States that World Health Day next year - 7 April 1995 - will stress the drive to eradicate poliomyelitis from the world by the year 2000, and will have the theme of poliomyelitis eradication, using the slogan:

TARGET 2000 - A WORLD WITHOUT POLIO

In 1988, the World Health Assembly committed the Organization and its Member States to attaining this goal. Since that time, experience has clearly demonstrated that eradication of poliomyelitis is feasible and that the World Health Organization target of eradicating the disease by the year 2000 can be achieved. The necessary means already exist - effective vaccines, proven strategies and well-coordinated laboratory services. The main obstacles are a lack of political will and support for eradication as well as insufficient funding to purchase vaccine for those who need it most. As in smallpox eradication, the World Health Organization is uniquely placed to provide leadership and coordination in this major initiative.

Eradicating poliomyelitis will end much human suffering throughout the world. Once children no longer need to be protected against this disease through routine immunization, there will be considerable and lasting financial benefits in both developing and highly industrialized countries. As a result of the laboratory networks and epidemiological surveillance programmes developed for eradication purposes, the quality of public health services will be improved.

Many countries and regions have already made dramatic progress towards global eradication of poliomyelitis. Not a single case of polio due to the wild virus has been identified anywhere in the Western hemisphere for the last three years. WHO's Western Pacific Region is poised to become the second polio-free region in 1995. The number of countries worldwide reporting zero incidence of poliomyelitis rose to 141 in 1993, the highest ever recorded.

The remaining six years are going to be the most difficult ones. That is why the global community will need the unwavering commitment of governments, genuine community participation and wholehearted dedication of the ministries of health and their staff as well as nongovernmental organizations. The eradication of poliomyelitis is within our reach. People need to know that they can make it happen. It will be a fitting and, indeed, lasting gift to future generations.

GENEVA, 18 August 1994