

WEEK 15 FOUNDATION MINUTE – AFRICA’S EPN ACHIEVEMENT

On August 25, 2020, the World Health Organization certified the entire continent of Africa to be free of the polio virus. Sitting in the safety of North America, it is hard to comprehend just how significant this achievement is. The continent of Africa is comprised of 47 countries, each of which has fought to eradicate polio from its populations for decades. Health systems are compromised, travel is difficult, and vaccination teams frequently encountered resistance to vaccinations. Nigeria, the African continent’s most populous country, became polio-free four years ago – but it took until now for all of the remaining pockets of infection to be fully certified as free from the polio virus.

The last cases of polio caused by the wild virus in the African region were recorded in Nigeria’s northern state of Borno in August 2016, after two years with no cases. Conflict, particularly with Boko Haram groups trying to prevent vaccinations, along with challenges in reaching mobile populations, had hampered efforts to immunize children there.

Now that the African region is free of wild poliovirus, five of WHO’s six regions, representing more than 90 percent of the world’s population, are now free of the disease. Polio caused by the wild virus is still endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in the WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean region. Rotarians worldwide are working to reach and vaccinate every single child. It costs \$3.00 to administer the 6 doses necessary to protect each child. Together we can reach the finish line!