Brazzaville, 24 October 2015 – Today, we celebrate a very special World Polio Day and a historic moment in the WHO African Region, one without a case of wild polio virus in over a year. The day comes just days before the official ceremony with the President of Nigeria to take the country off the polio endemic list. The day is a true testament of what political will, government leadership and the collective efforts of partners can achieve when united behind a global public health good.

The successes in Africa demonstrate that strategies for eradication of vaccine preventable diseases work when they are fully implemented. Health care workers, community mobilizers, religious and traditional leaders are the real unsung heroes in the fight against polio. The combined, coordinated efforts of these front-line workers have brought us to where we are today, a step closer to global polio eradication. Creating community demand has increased access to polio vaccination and basic health care services through a combination of awareness-raising activities related to the disease, its consequences and its prevention.

The real and dramatic progress in the fight against polio is a monumental step but the fight is far from over. We need to consistently and routinely immunize all children until there is not a single case anywhere. Also, surveillance has to be strengthened to timely detect and respond to any polio case until Africa is certified polio-free.

Limited resources, competing health priorities and weak health systems continue to be a challenge in the African Region. Re-doubling efforts to reach every child and strengthening routine vaccination, particularly in the most under-served, high-risk and insecure areas, will protect progress made and ensure no child will ever again suffer the terrible effects of lifelong

polio-paralysis.

We much appreciate the significant technical and financial contributions made by development partners and donors to the noble cause of polio eradication in Africa. We expect that this support be sustained till Africa is polio-free.

Today marks a time to reflect on the successes of polio and to accelerate progress in other public health programmes.

Today, we are ever closer to achieving a polio-free world.

Dr Matshidiso Moeti
WHO Regional Director for Africa