

Immunization Programs as a Cover for Spying Operations

At the 41st World Health Assembly in 1988, a goal was set for the worldwide eradication of polio by the year 2000.¹ The Global Polio Eradication Initiative was undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO), US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Today, however, polio is still active in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan. In Pakistan, there are 198 known cases of polio.²

Polio vaccination programs have a long history of controversy among Muslims in Pakistan. Rumors that vaccinations are a Western plot to sterilize women and that some vaccines contains the AIDS virus have gained traction in recent years.³ Some Muslims believe that according to Islamic Law vaccines are unclean. WHO and UNICEF have partnered with Islamic scholars and clerics to issue fatwas (legal opinions in Islamic faith) stating vaccinations are safe to help eradicate polio and other diseases.⁴

Recently, public health officials from Tulane University, Harvard, John Hopkins, and other universities uncovered proof that the recent increase in polio is connected to a secret spy operation. That is, a polio vaccination program was used by the CIA to help gain information on the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. In January 2013, a total of thirteen Schools of Public Health wrote to President Obama urging him to stop the use of vaccine programs as cover for spying operations. The universities argued that the practice needed to be stopped to protect humanitarian volunteers and gain back the trust of the Pakistani people, many of whom are vulnerable to polio.

In May 2014, Lisa O. Monaco, assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, responded to the thirteen Universities by stating the CIA will now, "...make no operational use of vaccination programs, which include vaccination workers."⁵

Since the inauguration of the vaccination-spying program in Pakistan, more than sixty polio workers, humanitarian volunteers, and security personnel have been killed. Pakistani villagers have chased off humanitarian workers in fear of CIA spying. WHO has stated that polio has re-emerged as a public health emergency in Pakistan.⁶

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Under what circumstances (if any) is the use of an ostensibly humanitarian program for ulterior purposes justified?
2. Under what circumstances (if any) should governments provide aid to countries known to harbor terrorists?
3. When is it justifiable for a professional (or profession) to neglect the ethical principles they previously agreed to abide by?

¹ http://www.polioeradication.org/content/publications/19880513_resolution.pdf

² http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/10/health/cia-vaccine-ruse-in-pakistan-may-have-harmed-polio-fight.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&

³ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/10/health/cia-vaccine-ruse-in-pakistan-may-have-harmed-polio-fight.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&

⁴ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/10/health/cia-vaccine-ruse-in-pakistan-may-have-harmed-polio-fight.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&

⁵ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1164764-monaco-letter-on-vaccine-workers.html>

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/20/cia-vaccination-programmes-counterterrorism>

