

**Government of Pakistan
Ministry of National Health Services,
Regulations and Coordination**

Press Release

Federal Health Minister Saira Afzal Tarar conferred Sitara-i-Imtiaz for turning around Polio Saira Afzal Tarar becomes the first Minister to receive the coveted Sitara i Imtiaz

Islamabad: March 23, 2018- Federal Minister for National Health Services Saira Afzal Tarar was conferred Sitara-i-Imtiaz by the President on Pakistan Day in recognition of her leadership that led to the turnaround in Polio situation.

In 2013 Pakistan was facing a raging outbreak of Polio, a disease that causes permanent irreversible disability. Hundreds of children across the country were falling prey to the Polio virus and the country was facing international embarrassment being held responsible for export of the virus to countries in the region and beyond. Terrorists and miscreants in some parts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas had imposed ban on the Polio Campaign, Polio teams were unable to operate with rampant threats and attacks in different parts of the country. The Polio Eradication Program was being driven by international agencies with no national ownership. As soon as Mrs. Saira Afzal Tarar took office in June 2013 she accepted the challenge and led from the front with utmost dedication and commitment to save Pakistani children from the crippling disease and restore the country's image internationally as Pakistan was being considered the stumbling block in achieving the goal of a polio free world.

Mrs. Saira Afzal Tarar was instrumental in having Polio Eradication declared a National Health Emergency, in establishment of the National Task Force on Polio Eradication led by the Prime Minister. She established the National Emergency Operation Centers and its corresponding Provincial Emergency Operation Centers in Provincial Capitals and FATA to create nerve centers for coordination of all stakeholders in the fight against polio. With her efforts Cabinet Committee on Polio Eradication and Immunization was established which allowed for involvement of security apparatus in collaboration with Interior Ministry and Pakistan Army, in combating and eliminating challenge posed by the militancy to the Polio Program. She ventured out into the provinces and areas of serious concern making road trips to affected regions in the heart of Baluchistan. She helped form Provincial Task Forces and met Provincial Chief Ministers convincing them to lead the campaigns and accord it top priority. She made an all-out effort to mobilize resources for the program committing sufficient funds nationally and garnering support from international partners to launch a major offensive against the Polio virus across the country.

She took the floor at the major international forums including the UN, World Health Assembly and International Monitoring Board for Polio Eradication effectively presenting Pakistan's case and sharing the Pakistan's epic fight back under her leadership to turnaround the Polio situation. Realizing that an efficient vaccine management system was critical to success of the polio campaigns, she led a major reform process in establishing a world class vaccine management and tracking system which won ISO certification and was presented as a model globally for developing world to adopt. She led the development of the most effective communication and advocacy strategy which resulted in support for the program by key segments of the society including ulema and top religious scholars besides successfully meeting the challenge of refusals and misconceptions.

Cognizant of the proliferation of Polio virus in the federal capital Islamabad, Mrs. Saira Afzal Tarar brought all stakeholders together, visited the katchi abadis in the outskirts of the city personally monitoring Polio campaigns to arrest the spread of virus.

Mrs. Saira Afzal Tarar brought transparency and good governance to the program ensuring that the resources are optimally utilized for our children and that the most competent and dedicated team is tasked to implement the Policies and strategies under her leadership. It is a result of her continued advocacy and leadership that there is the highest level of Political commitment across Pakistan to the cause of Polio Eradication. Pakistan today has the lowest ever cases of Polio and its performance in stopping Polio virus transmission has won highest appreciation at international fora.

As Federal Health Minister she is credited with major achievements and reforms including the launch of Pakistan's largest ever health insurance Program, the Prime Minister's National Health Program, introducing the country's first-ever drug pricing policy, revamping Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, giving the first National Health Vision among others.

In recognition of her outstanding services to Pakistan in protecting and safeguarding the health of our children from Poliomyelitis, the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has been pleased to confer upon Mrs. Saira Afzal Tarar the award of Sitara-i-Imtiaz.