Avian Influenza International Ministerial Conference
Sharm El-Sheikh, 25-26 October 2008

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) welcomes the conclusions and vision of the future expressed at the International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (25-26 October 2008, Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt), which consolidate the views shared by the OIE and sister organisations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, and the World Bank.

The OIE delegation was headed by its Director General, Dr Bernard Vallat. In his opening address, he issued the following warning:

‘...any programme for the final eradication of H5N1 in poultry must be linked to incentives for improvement of poultry production and control of other poultry diseases at backyard poultry owner level and [the programme] must be supported by the international community, focusing on the few countries with an endemic situation.’

He also spoke of the possibility of cross infections, whereby infected humans could re-introduce the pandemic strain into animals, as a critical aspect of global human pandemic preparedness. Such cross infections would complicate the eradication of the disease in both humans and animals and justify increased cooperation between veterinary and medical services.

Furthermore, Dr Vallat underlined the importance of permanently monitoring the situation in both the animal and human sector thanks to Member Countries’ efforts in the field of surveillance and early detection of diseases.

It was agreed that a better understanding of the causes of the emergence and spread of infectious diseases is needed under the broad perspective of the ‘One World, One Health’ (OWOH) principles, which have been developed jointly by the four specialised agencies FAO, OIE, WHO, UNICEF, along with the World Bank and the United Nations System Influenza Coordinator (UNUSIC), in response to the recommendation made at the New Delhi international conference on highly pathogenic influenza (HPIA) H5N1 (New Delhi, India, December 2007).

Dr Vallat highlighted the need to change initial and continuous training programmes of both veterinarians and physicians in the field of zoonoses.

He announced that the OIE would be organising a global conference on veterinary education, to be held in Paris, France, in October 2009.

The parallel implementation of the existing mechanisms adopted by countries will be necessary: the WHO International Health Regulations (WHO-IHR) relating to public health, the OIE WAHIS notification system for animal diseases, and GLEWS (Global Early Warning System), the joint platform for disease information shared by WHO, the OIE and FAO.

The Conference took steps to ensure that the best possible means are put in place for worldwide control of the disease in animals and prevention of the global threat represented by H5N1 avian influenza.
The 6th International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza
25-26 October 2008, Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt
Universal solidarity, justice and equity

Evolving pattern of work since 2005
Participants in the conference reiterated the need to sustain global efforts as outlined in previous international ministerial conferences: Washington (2005), Beijing, Vienna, Bamako (2006), and New Delhi (2007), as well as the partners technical meeting organised by FAO, OIE, WHO, and World Bank in Geneva 2005. The Washington meeting inaugurated the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza. The Beijing principles outlined the core strategy for controlling Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and preparing for an influenza pandemic; the Bamako Declaration emphasised the importance of international cooperation to support preparedness and response capacity in Africa; the New Delhi Road Map offered a valuable benchmark for the preparedness efforts of national authorities and proposed a convergence between animal and human health systems through contributions to the ‘One World, One Health’ concept.

Progress to date and factors for success
The Progress Report presented at the Conference ‘Responses to Avian Influenza and State of Pandemic Readiness’, prepared by the UN System Influenza Coordinator and the World Bank, indicated that in 2008 there have been fewer outbreaks of HPAI in poultry, in fewer countries, and fewer reported human cases of H5N1 infection, than in the preceding two years. This presents a unique opportunity to build on the tools and platforms which have enabled this success to address broader global threats. Despite these successes, the world must still prepare to contain, and if necessary mitigate, to address broader global threats. Despite these successes, the world must still prepare to contain, and if necessary mitigate, an influenza pandemic.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE
The challenges addressed in Sharm el-Sheikh
During the conference, Ministers and senior officials addressed three challenges:
1. ensuring that the world is fully prepared to mitigate the impact of an influenza pandemic or another unforeseen catastrophe;
2. sustaining efforts to control HPAI, especially in poultry, and – eventually – to eradicate H5N1 from domestic animals in the remaining contaminated countries;
3. initiating longer-term action – responding to infectious diseases that emerge at the animal, human and ecosystem interface, and are capable of causing severe damage and affecting livelihoods.

Participants considered these challenges as they analysed national, regional and global efforts to prevent and control major diseases and prepare for pandemics and respond both to HPAI and other emerging infectious diseases of animal origin (EIDAO). They recognised that success usually reflects a number of different factors, working together within each country at both national and local levels. These include:
– sustained engagement of political leaders,
– surge capacity – when necessary – to rapidly increase the deployment of skilled professional response teams,
– collaborative action across government ministries (including livestock, health, environment, disaster response and civil defense services),
– continuous engagement of the private sector and civil society,
– functioning systems to ensure incentives and compensation for economic losses, and
– engagement of communities and decision makers through integrated, sustained and transparent communication.

Participants emphasised the need to continue to support, strengthen and improve the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network and its procedures through the timely sharing of viruses or specimens with WHO collaborating centres, as a foundation of public health, to ensure critical risk assessment and response, and to aim to ensure and promote transparent, fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the generation of information, diagnostics, medicines, vaccines and other technologies. Participants also highlighted the need to increase vaccine production capacities. Participants also identified the ongoing need for applied research, product development and the prompt transfer of relevant technologies.

In their interventions, participants presented visions to guide collective action in 2009 and beyond; they established priorities that call for urgent attention and identified ways of working that best contribute to successful implementation. They noted that though the threats of HPAI and an influenza pandemic persist, the current strategies have led to promising results. In order to sustain improvements in animal health, ensure human health security, and prepare the world for a pandemic, the approach must be sustained in years to come; this calls both for continued political engagement from national leaders, robust institutional arrangements that encourage joint working within
Participants expressed determination to continue efforts to ensure that test and update pandemic plans contaminated countries as possible, and to prevent human cases. With the application of all available technologies, to eliminate H5N1 in and with focus on those places where viral transmission persists and minimise the risk of human infections.

Eradication of HPAI H5N1 in poultry and minimise the risk of human infections

Participants also envisaged that it is feasible, through concerted action and with focus on those places where viral transmission persists and with the application of all available technologies, to eliminate H5N1 in domestic animals in the short to medium term in as many of the contaminated countries as possible, and to prevent human cases.

Continued need to develop, test and update pandemic plans

Participants emphasised the need to continue efforts to ensure that the pandemic preparedness efforts of national authorities are multi-sectoral and involve the full range of concerned sectors within government, stakeholders from private entities, the voluntary sector and civil society. They recognised that simulation exercises were an effective means of identifying gaps and weaknesses in pandemic preparedness plans. They noted that pandemic preparedness should be an essential element of broader national disaster management plans, which will strengthen the resilience of societies and communities when faced with a range of future threats. They noted the importance of business continuity planning to maintain essential services (water, power, shelter, food, transport, finance, public order, healthcare). They noted the importance of planning to meet the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations in poor countries.

Information and material sharing and transparency

Participants emphasised the need for an open and transparent sharing of epidemiological information, materials, and technologies at national, regional and international levels.

Strategic communication and policy advocacy

It was suggested that communities everywhere should be engaged in the planning and implementation of strategies for HPAI control and pandemic preparedness and response. Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Education, Information, Tourism and others, as well as national and international media and non-governmental organisations, should be encouraged to collaborate to change attitudes, behaviours and practices amongst all national, migrant and refugee communities especially in countries affected by HPAI.

Prevention of and response to emerging diseases of animal origin

Participants appreciated the effort to control HPAI and prepare for a pandemic had paved the way for an enhanced worldwide effort to reduce risks associated with emerging diseases of animal origin. They discussed ‘Contributing to One World, One Health,’ a strategic framework for reducing risks of infectious diseases in the animal-human-ecosystem interface which was prepared by FAO, OIE, WHO.
UNICEF and the World Bank. They accepted that this approach shows promise and discussions in the conference represent a first step in its development and implementation. National and regional authorities should take time to consider this approach.

**Education and training**

Participants noted the need to adopt medical and veterinary curricula to strengthen initial and continuing training of officials for human and animal health services, including appropriate ecosystems health studies. The need for increased harmonisation of animal and human health training was also noted.

**Research and development**

There are a significant number of important research issues that need attention in addressing the problem of HPAI and other emerging infectious diseases (EID) with zoonotic and/or pandemic potential. These include improved understanding of the drivers, factors for spread, and pathogen ecology and further areas for research will need to be identified and prioritised. In addition, the delivery of technical options needs to be improved and rationalised through, epidemiological studies linked to socio-economic and policy research. This should include an accelerated development of appropriate technology transfer including appropriate human and veterinary vaccines which are easier to administer and which produce longer lasting immunity. Support should be provided through international cooperative programmes to support the capacity of developing countries to produce these vaccines.

**PROSPECTIVE WAYS OF WORKING**

Recognising that societies derive many benefits from both HPAI control and pandemic preparedness efforts, participants emphasised continuing spirit of international partnership and equity, transparent sharing of information, and more equitable access to benefits, standardisation of indicators of progress and a greater focus on quantitative results, more involvement of the private sector and civil society, and continued engagement of regional organisations in the priority areas.

Participants noted that the Intergovernmental Meeting on ‘Pandemic Influenza Preparedness: Sharing of Influenza Viruses and Access to Vaccines and other Benefits’ is scheduled to resume at the World Health Organization in Geneva in December 2008. They highlighted the importance of resolving the issues and coming to agreement in order to expedite pandemic influenza preparedness.

Participants noted and appreciated the generous support provided by the donor community throughout the international conference process, including the new pledges made during this conference. The continued gap between level of requirements and resources available was recognised, as was the importance for mobilisation of resources and sustained support from the donor community and concerned international organisations for developing countries in their efforts to achieve sustained animal and human health and food security. Participants noted the current financial crisis. It was hoped that this would not negatively impact future support to combat avian and pandemic influenza.

Participants also recognised that effective partnerships take time to develop, and they appreciated that much of what has been achieved is a result of careful, patient and sustained effort by many dedicated organisations and individuals. They valued the sequence of international ministerial conferences, and other international fora, that brings stakeholders together and offer a valuable opportunity for reflection, learning and commitment to coordinated action. They agreed to meet again to review progress and acknowledged that the Government of Vietnam has extended the invitation to host, if requested, such an event.

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**Maryvonne Barbaray NÉVA**
Tel. 01 41 94 51 51
e-mail: neva@neva.fr

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**Award Ceremony**
From left to right:
Catherine Gaillard-Lavirotte, chief editor,
Maryvonne Barbaray, managing editor (NÉVA), Jean-Luc Cadoret, from the scientific committee, editorial director of the prize-winning article on jaundice