Welcome by Dr Carlos Correa Messuti
President, World Organisation for Animal Health

On behalf of the OIE, I am pleased to extend my most heartfelt welcome on the occasion of the first OIE Global Conference on Wildlife devoted to "Animal Health and Biodiversity – Preparing for the Future". We have organised it with the Wildlife Conservation Society, and with the support of the FAO and the WHO.

The OIE is one of the eldest members of the family of international organisations. It was founded in 1924, with the aim of controlling the spread of infectious animal diseases worldwide. Throughout its nearly 90 years of work, the OIE has kept pace with the changing trends and needs of the international community, and extended its mandate to cover, in synergy with sister organisations such as the FAO and the WHO, public health issues related to zoonoses, food safety and security, animal welfare, animal production and the liberalisation and smooth operation of international trade.

The challenges of today's world are particularly complex and daunting. Allow me just to mention, by way of example, the need to achieve universal food security or the fight against the negative impact of climate change. The OIE has been relentless in its efforts to contribute, within the limits of its mandate, to the global management of these important issues.

On this occasion we have chosen to emphasise the threats to animal and public health and to biodiversity stemming from the wild animal/domestic animal/human/ecosystems interface. In this Conference, we likewise intend to analyse other consequences of this interface, such as its economic and social aspects, the protection of biodiversity and the environment, and its impact on trade and tourism.

The OIE has taken stock of wildlife's increasing influence on the global epidemiological situation, and of the need to seek support from national animal health systems, represented by Veterinary Services. The two-way transmission of infectious diseases between wild and domestic animals, with its potential threat to public health and to the environment, presents formidable challenges. To meet them, our Organisation created, in 1993, a standing Working Group on Wildlife Diseases, made up of a geographically representative group of experts, which has been very actively drafting important recommendations in its field. We have also asked Members to designate a national focal point in charge, inter alia, of notifying cases of wildlife diseases; this activity commenced in 2008.

The protection of biodiversity is a subject in its own right, and is intimately linked to the well-being, indeed the very survival, of the human species. We are aware that the OIE's mandate does not explicitly refer to the protection of biodiversity. Nevertheless, its international standard-setting activities for the prevention and control of animal diseases constitute a major contribution to that objective.

When we engage in the protection and conservation of nature and its ecosystems, and must therefore study the interactions amongst living beings and their environment, we are faced with highly complex scenarios and with situations characterised by uncertainty or in which we have insufficient and incomplete data, all of which makes a proper evaluation difficult. We...
nonetheless believe that science and technology provide us with methods and principles, including risk analysis, that are indispensable in this regard, and represent the best way to make progress.

Along with our partners, we have organised an open conference, with broad participation, and have invited specialists, animal health professionals, and officials in charge of managing natural resources from all Member Countries, from the public and private sectors, as well as relevant NGOs. We believe that discussion in open and inclusive fora is the best way to understand the problems facing us and to find tools for their successful management. Today’s world requires an interdisciplinary approach that includes the biological, medical and veterinary sciences, as well as expertise in the fields of wildlife, ecology, and many other fields, and that involves society as a whole.

As President of the OIE, I am pleased to note the excellent response to our new global initiative. I wish you every success in your proceedings, and hope that the best possible conclusions and recommendations will emerge from this conference.

Thank you very much