THE OIE AND ITS NETWORK OF REFERENCE CENTRES

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The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) is an intergovernmental organisation with a mandate from its 178 Members to improve animal health worldwide. The OIE is the reference international standard-setting organisation according to the Agreement of the World Trade Organization. It is responsible for ensuring the transparency of the animal disease situation worldwide, including diseases transmissible to humans, as well as safeguarding the sanitary safety of global trade in animals and animal products and ensuring food safety. Since 2000 the organisation also publishes international standards on animal welfare.

The OIE has regional and sub-regional offices on every continent and has signed cooperation agreements with more than 50 regional and international organisations, including the World Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (WAVLD) adopted on 6 February 2006.

To ensure scientific excellence, the OIE builds its expertise on a network of world renowned Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres that play an essential role in prevention, detection and control of animal diseases worldwide. In June 2013, the OIE has a global network of 241 Reference Laboratories with 183 approved experts covering 116 diseases/topics in 37 countries, and 43 Collaborating Centres in 24 countries.

OIE Reference Laboratories are designated to pursue all the scientific and technical issues relating to a named disease or specific topic. The Expert should be a leading and active researcher helping the Reference Laboratory to provide scientific and technical assistance and expert advice on topics linked to surveillance and control of the disease for which the Reference Laboratory is responsible. They also provide scientific and technical training, and coordinate scientific and technical studies in collaboration with other laboratories or organisations, including through OIE Laboratory Twinning.

OIE Collaborating Centres are centres of expertise in a specific designated sphere of competence relating to the management of general questions on animal health issues ("specialty"). In its designated specialty, they must provide their expertise internationally.

The global network of OIE Reference Centres is the central core of the OIE’s science-based approach. The First International Conference of OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres (held in Florianopolis, Brazil, in 2006) recommended that a network of OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres be developed with the objective of harmonising and exchanging data, information and reference material to improve disease surveillance and control worldwide. The Second Global Conference of OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres (held in Paris in June 2010) encouraged the networks of OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres to continue working together to strengthen multilateral cooperation, in particular with the aim of producing and increasing availability of validated biological reference materials. A third Global Conference of OIE Reference Centres will be organised in Korea (Rep. of) in 2104 and the outcome of this seminar on new approaches to diagnosis will be part of the programme.

In May 2011, the Terms of Reference for OIE Reference Centres were updated and now require explicitly that a network among all the OIE Reference Centres designated for the same pathogen or specialty has to be established and maintained. The network of OIE Reference Laboratories shall assure congruent results across laboratories through the adherence to OIE Standards, the sharing of reference materials within the network and the participation in appropriate proficiency testing.