

80th OIE General Session
Opening Ceremony
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***Inaugural address by Dr Carlos Correa Messuti, President of
the OIE***

Honourable Ministers, Directors General, Excellencies, Delegates, colleagues and friends,

May I extend a very warm welcome on behalf of the OIE. Once again I have the honour of opening a World Assembly of national Delegates, invited to Paris to hold our Organisation's most important event.

Let me begin by saying that, for me, this meeting is especially important because it is the last time that I will be attending as President. So, I wish to share with you some general observations on achievements and progress thus far, as well as on problems and the work that I believe still remains to be done by our Organisation.

Let me begin by reaffirming the importance of consolidating the OIE's work in its priority areas: animal health; public health; food safety of animal products; animal welfare and world food security.

To this end, over the past three years we have continued to promote Good Veterinary Governance in a variety of ways. First, we have provided sustained support to national Veterinary Services through our evaluation, training and capacity-building activities, including the modernisation of national veterinary legislation. We have also made further progress with twinning Reference Centres. We have implemented activities to improve the quality of university veterinary education worldwide, to promote continuing professional development and to establish criteria and guidelines for appropriate national veterinary legislation.

True to its universal vocation, the OIE is also committed to the serious problems currently facing humanity and the planet itself, joining forces with other international organisations, especially in the struggle to achieve food security and alleviate poverty across the world.

So, what has been, and will continue to be, our global contribution, in accordance with our mandate and expertise?

First, we are responsible for world animal health and, in that capacity, we can contribute to the goal of increasing food availability and accessibility for all peoples of the world. Food of animal origin, including from aquatic animals, is the main source of first-class protein. However, it should be borne in mind that that at least 20% of food production is currently lost as a result of animal

diseases. Our mission of improving animal health worldwide, together with our scientific and technical work and advances, contributes directly to reducing the risk of animal and animal product losses and to ensuring food safety.

Second, better livestock health stimulates the growth and intensification of livestock production, which benefits both corporate and family farming, as well as rural populations, and has an indirect but real impact on poverty alleviation. Added to this is the OIE's contribution to more predictable international trade in animal products, through its standards and guidelines, which are benchmarks for the World Trade Organization (WTO).

I am pleased to see the principle of multidisciplinary and holistic analysis gradually taking hold in our work. We need to continue to integrate life, medical and veterinary sciences, as well as wildlife and ecology specialists and many others, such as academics, scientists and field technicians, as well as representatives of production, industry and non-governmental organisations.

The shared “*One Health*” concept is a good example of this inter-institutional approach to tackling biological risk prevention at the complex animal–human–ecosystems interface. The technical item of this year's Assembly will be addressing this very issue.

The OIE has worked for many years with the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) under the “*One Health*” concept, in particular to address the global risk of antimicrobial resistance. While antimicrobials are essential to the health and welfare of animals and ensuring that animal production meets global demand, their use must be properly controlled, particularly by veterinarians working with animals, in compliance with OIE standards and guidelines, including the list of veterinary critically important antimicrobials published by the OIE.

Apart from the “*One Health*” approach, the OIE adheres to a further two important principles: the principle of prevention, which we call taking action in ‘peace time’, and which optimises the cost–benefit of controlling animal diseases; and the *principle of interdependence* between all countries in the area of animal health, meaning that the way in which a national administration manages diseases – either responsibly or negligently – will have consequences beyond its own borders, affecting everyone in a positive or negative way.

I am pleased with the smooth operation of the OIE World Animal Health and Welfare Fund and can vouch publicly for the neutrality and fairness with which decisions are adopted and implemented by the Fund. May I also point out, once again, that it is only thanks to these generous resources that we are able to offer so many activities to support our Member Countries, as our limited budget is needed to update OIE standards and guidelines.

We have made significant improvements in the communication and information we provide and distribute, both by redesigning and updating our website and by consolidating two global systems: the OIE World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) and World Animal Health Information Database (WAHID).

Our work on developing and updating international standards and recommendations provides the best guarantee for controlling animal diseases and promotes the liberalisation of international trade. Our standards are adopted on the soundest scientific basis and are discussed within a framework of transparency and participation by all Members and stakeholders. The OIE standard-setting and adoption procedure is highly effective and allows the ever-changing needs of the international community to be met in full.

We approved the OIE Fifth Strategic Plan 2011–2016 in 2010 and began to implement it in 2011. Last year we reached a historic agreement to modernise many of our General Rules, which enabled us to adapt to the reality of 2012, as it was no longer possible for the Organisation to operate on the basis of premises dating from 1924. Last year, too, in the midst of celebrations for the 250th anniversary of our veterinary profession, a major global milestone was reached by a group of international organisations spearheaded by the OIE: global eradication of rinderpest.

Finally, another of the many positive achievements is the emphasis placed in the OIE's work on the eradication and control of foot and mouth disease. You might well describe me as a steadfast militant for this cause. How could it be otherwise? I come from a region with one of the highest levels of sheep and cattle exports and production in the world and have seen for myself the damage the disease can do to these sectors and, ultimately, to rural society and the economy.

Foot and mouth is one of the world's most widespread animal diseases, so there is no alternative but to join forces to fight it. However, we must also – and of this I am absolutely convinced – set our sights on controlling it worldwide. Our success in fighting rinderpest should be our benchmark and inspiration. Of course, I have not forgotten that it took at least 2 000 years to win the rinderpest battle, so I am not talking about eradicating foot and mouth any time soon. However, I believe that our generation has the historic and ethical duty to sow the seed of an undertaking that will probably not bear fruit in the lifetime of any of us. We are all well aware that the battle against animal diseases is often something that we agree to wage for the benefit of future generations more than for our own, but this should not diminish our dedication or enthusiasm.

I take this opportunity to mention that next month the OIE, jointly with FAO, will be holding the second Global Conference on Foot and Mouth Disease Control in Bangkok, Thailand. It is an event that will bring together leading world experts, international and regional organisations, and donors, which I invite everyone to attend and to contribute.

On a less positive note, I have not been completely satisfied with some of the issues that we have been promoting over the past three years and, in my view, they require further improvement. The first I wish to mention is coordinated work with international organisations. The OIE has invested heavily in such coordination, offering its experience and openness to all related international organisations, the United Nations System of Organizations and WTO. However,

I believe we need to increase the effective level of coordination among organisations – first and foremost because we must optimise the use of scarce global resources. At a time when the economic and financial crisis is imposing severe budget constraints, it is vital to dispense with duplication and compartmentalisation. In addition, cooperation will enable us not only to conserve resources; working jointly will enhance each organisation's individual experience, creating synergies that achieve better overall outcomes.

These reflections lead me to a second issue linked closely to the first: coordination between the various delegates of a single country, appointed to different international forums. Even though national coordination is vital in ensuring consistent national positions in all multilateral and regional bodies and organisations and in defending national interests to best effect, such coordination does not always exist or run smoothly.

I would also stress that countries should exert more influence on the work of international organisations, as countries are the principals and the masters of such organisations. When participation is low, not only do countries relinquish an absolutely unrivalled opportunity to contribute, organisations lose direction and representativeness as a result.

I therefore invite all national Delegates to the OIE, especially those from developing and transition countries, to be more involved in the OIE. Despite the framework of openness in which we work, Members' participation in many of the Organisation's activities could be greater, especially in setting international standards and preparing OIE manuals.

I believe that the Regional Conferences have a key role to play in encouraging greater participation by all Members, as they provide the most appropriate forum in which countries with similar interests and problems can voice their concerns and plan for the future. This was one of the most important lessons I learned during my term as President. Regional Conferences are one of the OIE's strengths, and we need to evaluate and enhance them. Take the example of Africa. The Africa region uses its conferences and meetings to discuss and develop coordinated positions, which it then puts forward collectively at our Assembly.

Lastly, let me share with you a more personal facet of this review. The OIE Presidency has allowed me to fully comprehend one of our Organisation's most distinctive features: its plurality and diversity. This has been immensely enriching for me, both personally and professionally. Even though my home region of the Americas is itself highly diverse and richly varied, I needed to "open my mind" and broaden my perspective to grasp the extremely disparate conditions and circumstances that characterise the different countries and regions in the world represented in the OIE. As I have already said on previous occasions, I firmly believe that, far from dividing us, this disparity and these differences are one of our greatest strengths, which we must continue to cultivate and preserve as we gradually build the common path to which our institution is committed. Over the past nearly 90 years, the OIE has successfully amalgamated these many disparities to create a model of universality and

integrity, employing best practices of democracy, inclusiveness, participation and transparency. I trust that it will continue along this path.

At this Assembly, we shall again be choosing our leaders. Independently of the election process, it is my hope that consensus will be reached to enable the appointments to reflect proportional geographic distribution and ensure that the best experts from among us are chosen.

Colleagues and friends, over the past three years I was obliged to devote a great deal of time and effort to my office as President, but it was an exciting endeavour and I enjoyed working in an environment of unflagging collaboration. My family shared in my sense of responsibility and was understanding about my frequent absences. Veterinary colleagues from my home country and the Region offered their enthusiastic backing, and Delegates and Regional Representatives honoured me with their support and friendship. My special thanks and appreciation go to Dr Bernard Vallat and his efficient team of technicians and administrators in Paris, whose assistance has been invaluable.

I am very grateful to you all and remain at your entire disposal.

May I now invite you to turn your attention to discussing the items on the Agenda. I wish you all the best and am certain that our Organisation's annual Assembly of Delegates will achieve its customary excellent outcomes.

Thank you very much.
