



The General Session of the World Assembly of Delegates of the OIE: an essential annual event for the Veterinary Services of every continent

10/10/2011 The World Assembly of Delegates of the OIE (the Assembly) is the organisation's supreme body and comprises the national Delegates to the OIE of all Member Countries, appointed as official representatives by their governments. When it meets annually in General Session at the OIE Headquarters in Paris, France, the Assembly acts as a "world parliament", adopting standards and passing resolutions, in particular on control policies and methods for the most important animal diseases.

The commitment of each and every Delegate is the only way to ensure continuity in the OIE's standard-setting process, a prerequisite for implementing its action worldwide.

In May 2011, over 600 participants, representing more than 150 OIE Member Countries and more than 50 intergovernmental, regional and national organisations, attended the 79th General Session of the Assembly, with the notable presence of high-level personalities, including the President of the Republic of Paraguay and numerous government ministers.

This year's General Session was also a highlight in the celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of the veterinary profession.

As every year, the Assembly developed, revised and updated international standards relating to animal health, food safety and animal welfare demonstrating yet again the importance that all OIE Members place on developing together new systems and mechanisms to prevent and control animal diseases, including those transmissible to humans, at a national, regional and global level.

The 79th General Session was also a historic event since the Assembly officially and unanimously recognised that all 198 countries of the world with rinderpest-susceptible animal populations had now been certified by the OIE as free from this dreadful disease, which through the centuries has had such devastating effects on animals and society livelihoods. This recognition thus opened the way for the solemn declaration of the global eradication of rinderpest. This is the first animal disease to have been eradicated by mankind and marks a major step forward, not only for science, but also for the policies of cooperation between international organisations such as the OIE and FAO and indeed with the whole of the international community. It constitutes a major historic success for the Veterinary Services of the entire world and for the whole of the veterinary profession, of which we can all be proud.

The welcome achievement of rinderpest eradication amply demonstrates that implementing animal disease control programmes can be successful if all countries are resolute in their scientific, technical, political and economic commitment. With this in mind, the Assembly asked the OIE to engage in the task of preparing new strategies which, in the coming years, will allow progress to be made with worldwide control of other major diseases, such as foot and mouth disease (FMD), rabies and peste des petits ruminants.

In a similar vein, the Assembly voted to adopt a new article for the Terrestrial Animal Health Code chapter on FMD, making provision for the OIE to endorse national FMD control programmes that countries have submitted to it on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, the Delegates agreed that the OIE, in collaboration with FAO, should develop a global strategy for FMD control to be presented at the next Global Conference on FMD Control, being organised jointly by the two Organisations, with the Thai government, due to be held in Bangkok in June 2012. This is an ambitious undertaking and one in which I intend to be personally involved, with a view to convincing donors and government representatives of the need to prioritise investment in controlling this major disease of livestock, an activity that can be classed as a global public good.

The Assembly also demonstrated its concern for the issue of world food security by once again addressing the challenge of reducing the considerable animal production losses caused by animal diseases, so as to give the world's human population better access to the high quality animal protein contained in milk, eggs and meat. Reducing the incidence of these diseases must be seen as a priority if we are to meet the constant growth in demand for food products. To this end, it is vital to ensure that countries are equipped with good quality Veterinary Services, with the capacity to enforce health legislation updated to address new risks related to globalisation and climate change, notably in collaboration with animal producers. OIE standards on the quality and effectiveness of the Veterinary Services and the 'PVS Pathway' for the evaluation of Veterinary Services are highly relevant tools to help achieve this objective.

The OIE is in the forefront when it comes to making its voice heard in relevant international decision-making fora. This is to ensure that the need for good governance in the field of animal health and the need to strengthen international and regional networks in this respect are taken into account, thereby making a major contribution to world food security and the sanitary quality of food.

At the request of the Assembly, the OIE will further increase its support both for animal health and welfare policies and for Veterinary Services worldwide in order to promote sustainable food security and food safety, based on policies conducive to animal health and welfare and public health, while respecting the environment and biodiversity.

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