



## **The 80th General Session of the OIE: many milestones have been reached**

**16/10/2012** The 80th anniversary of the World Assembly of National Delegates of Member Countries of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) was an opportunity to take stock of the path travelled since the very first General Session, which took place on 8 March 1927. Twenty-six national Delegates attended this first session, during which Professor Emmanuel Leclainche was elected the first Director General of the organisation, then called the International Office of Epizootics.

The 26 Delegates that gathered together in Paris at the end of that winter in 1927 were visionaries, but could they ever have suspected back then that the 80th annual meeting of Delegates would assemble more than 750 participants? These participants included official representatives of 178 Member Countries, as well as many high-ranking authorities (including numerous Ministers), international organisations, intergovernmental organisations such as the FAO, WHO, the World Bank and WTO, and dozens of other governmental and non-governmental organisations, both regional and national.

This record participation of high-level authorities from all Member Countries is an indication of the global reach of the OIE. The annual General Session has become recognised as a world forum for exchange and reflection by all national and international actors – from both the private and the public sectors – who are involved in animal production and welfare, animal health, and veterinary public health, throughout the world.

Indeed, the standard-setting activities of the Assembly have extended beyond the initial mandate of the OIE, which centred on animal health, in such a way as to place the Organisation at the very heart of questions of animal welfare and veterinary public health, which encompass food safety and security and the development of the 'One Health' concept.

The most conclusive example of this pivotal role was the notable participation, at the 80th General Session, of Mr Robert Horsch, senior official of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, who presented 'Livestock Overview and Approach'. This strategy, developed by the Gates Foundation, concerns global support for the livestock sector. It specifically places at its forefront the importance of cooperation between the Foundation and the OIE in the areas of improving animal health and welfare, and highlights the role of Veterinary Services in the aim of contributing to the global reduction in poverty.

Of equal importance in the programme of the Assembly was the concept of 'One Health'. A study based on a questionnaire submitted to all Member Countries of the OIE demonstrated that the use of this concept has gained ground over recent years; particularly in highlighting the need to strengthen a collaborative, inter-sectoral approach to the prevention, detection and control of animal and human diseases. Veterinary Services are now recognised by all as

essential partners in public health, as a result of their role in the fight against diseases of animal origin.

In addition, this year, the Delegates adopted new guiding principles on setting generic standards for animal welfare in the sphere of animal production systems. They also adopted a new chapter on the welfare of beef cattle, thus opening the way to other standards which will be applied to other branches of animal production.

The OIE published the first international standards on animal welfare in 2005. They dealt with the transport of animals by land, sea and air, the slaughter of animals intended for human consumption and the elimination of animals for disease control purposes. Next came standards concerning the welfare of laboratory animals and the control of stray dog populations.

The adoption of standards related to animal welfare is progressing rapidly. The ratification system used by the OIE is now well-established and is used every year by Delegates at the General Session, as each standard-setting adoption is passed by consensus or – much more rarely – by a two-thirds majority, each country having its own voice. It is surely this mechanism that should be celebrated above all – thanks to this system we have experienced 80 years of an efficient, rapid and democratic process of setting standards that is unrivalled anywhere in the world.

In addition, during this General Session, the Delegates elected or re-elected eight members of the Council (the equivalent of the administrative board), as well as the members of five Regional Commissions and four Specialist Commissions, paying rigorous regard to the OIE criteria of scientific excellence and geographic distribution.

This 80th General Session also made its contribution to women's involvement in key positions, since Dr Karin Schwabenbauer (Germany) was elected President of the World Assembly of Delegates, thereby becoming the first woman to occupy this position in the history of the Organisation.

It only remains for me to wish the World Assembly of OIE Delegates many more such productive General Sessions in the future, which will allow the Organisation, as has been the case this year, to develop positions shared by 178 countries on subjects of major importance for the future of humanity.