

## **180 countries engaged in promoting animal health and welfare worldwide**

82nd OIE General Session

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The World Assembly of national Delegates of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) met for the 82nd time in May 2014 to consider and adopt the new intergovernmental standards and guidelines that contribute daily to improving animal health and welfare around the world. The OIE, which this year celebrates its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is ever more focused on the future and ready to face the global challenges ahead, in close collaboration with its extensive network of national policy-makers, leading scientists and partners.

Since 1924, the OIE has been constantly striving to improve animal health and welfare. Increasingly over the years, developments in disease surveillance, prevention and control and the many food safety challenges to be met have highlighted the need for strong cooperation between the animal health, public health and environment sectors.

As testimony to the powerful tripartite collaboration forged over the past decade under the “One Health” concept, Dr Margaret Chan and Mr José Graziano da Silva, Directors General of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), joined the opening ceremony of the 82<sup>nd</sup> OIE General Session. Around 900 participants were in attendance, including OIE Goodwill Ambassador Her Royal Highness Princess Haya Al Hussein, together with over 50 high-level politicians and institutional actors, including more than 30 ministers of OIE Member Countries.

Following a week of intensive work, the World Assembly of OIE national Delegates adopted 40 resolutions.

There has been a string of recent successes in terms of animal health and welfare worldwide. The eradication of rinderpest (2011) is a perfect example of a long-term endeavour by the OIE, its partners and all its Member Countries to develop global strategies to prevent and control animal diseases worldwide. In May 2014, a further step was taken to consolidate this historic success. The World Assembly of OIE Delegates adopted a resolution establishing a legal framework, developed jointly by FAO and the OIE, for the designation of facilities to hold remaining stocks of rinderpest vaccine or virus as from 2015, under very specific conditions. This followed an undertaking by OIE Member Countries in 2011 to notify and then destroy all existing stocks of the rinderpest virus or to store them in a small number of secure facilities.

This success is a message of hope in the fight against the major diseases still raging today, including rabies, foot and mouth disease (FMD) and peste des petits ruminants (PPR). The successful strategy used to eradicate rinderpest will remain a model for sustained long-term cooperation and for global, regional and national coordination.

The ongoing development of global programmes to eradicate PPR is based on this model. PPR is a devastating disease, not only for the health of small ruminants but also for the economic viability of

many poor family farms. To curb the spread of this disease, now present in much of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, the OIE has made it a high priority of its current and future work. This year, the Assembly adopted a resolution on a global PPR control and eradication strategy. The strategy is a joint FAO/OIE initiative under the GF-TADs<sup>1</sup> Programme, scheduled for its official launch at a global conference being held in March 2015.

For the very first time, 48 countries were also granted official PPR freedom at this year's OIE General Session. This procedure for OIE official recognition of Member Country freedom from certain priority diseases was introduced 15 years ago and is of crucial importance to global disease control and safe international trade in animals and animal products. The procedure also applies to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), FMD, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia (CBPP), African horse sickness and classical swine fever, as well as to the endorsement of national official control programmes for FMD, CBPP and PPR.

This year the OIE has also reaffirmed its commitment to supporting pastoral systems as a factor of development, poverty alleviation and sustainable land management. Effective control of infectious diseases in pastoral areas is essential not only to reducing animal health risks, safeguarding the livestock population and monitoring communities living in harsh conditions, but also to providing access for animals and animal products to foreign markets and reassuring potential investors.

While the OIE is working on these programmes over the long term, it also has to provide its Member Countries with a forum to discuss the latest animal health threats requiring immediate measures. This year the General Session provided Member Countries with an opportunity not only to examine the overall animal health situation in the world but also to discuss the recent outbreaks of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), BSE in Brazil, avian influenza H7N9 and H5N8 in Asia, rabies in Chinese Taipei and African swine fever in Eastern Europe. As a result of a consultation on porcine epidemic diarrhoea (PED) outbreaks in some countries of the Americas and Asia, it was decided to establish an OIE *ad hoc* group of international experts to monitor the evolution of PED worldwide and analyse control methods and risks for international trade in pigs and pork products. Thanks to the group's work, a PED technical disease card is now available online.

The 2014 General Session also provided an opportunity to continue work on the OIE's priority areas. This has led to stronger OIE standards on antimicrobial resistance and animal welfare in production systems. The OIE is also working to develop standards on the welfare of dairy cattle and working animals.

A brand new OIE standard has also been adopted to facilitate the safe international movement of sport horses, based on the concept of a specially supervised elite, high health status subpopulation. The standard is the first phase in a work plan established by the OIE jointly with the international federation for equestrian sports (FEI) and International Federation of Horseracing Authorities (IFHA), together with their national offices.

The signing of six new cooperation agreements with regional and international public and private institutions augurs well for the future and should serve as an example for the development of this

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<sup>1</sup> GF-TADs : FAO/OIE Global Framework for the progressive control of Transboundary Animal Diseases

type of collaboration. Indeed, meeting tomorrow's animal health challenges will require the coordinated mobilisation of stakeholders worldwide.

Another cornerstone of the system to ensure the effectiveness of OIE actions is the excellence of its high-level scientific network. This network of excellence has been built gradually over the years to attain its present vast and unprecedented scale. In May 2014, the Assembly accredited a further nine Reference Laboratories and six Collaborating Centres, bringing the number of OIE reference centres to 296 spread across five continents.

More than ever, this scientific expertise and its widest possible transfer form the basis for good global, regional and national governance of veterinary public health and for protecting both animal and human populations. This expertise supports all OIE Member Countries, which have increased to 180 this year, following the adoption of new Members Liberia and South Sudan.

This network of countries, expertise and stakeholders is today a guarantee of excellence and allows the OIE to fulfil its ongoing commitment to help build the capacity of its Members' key decision-makers in the areas of animal health and welfare. In addition, programmes to enhance solidarity among countries are being developed all the time. Laboratory twinning projects were introduced in 2006, with the aim of promoting exchanges of expertise and experience between countries with an OIE reference centre and candidate laboratories in developing countries. To date, 20 twinning projects have been completed and 36 are ongoing. Building on this successful experience, in 2013 the OIE started to develop twinning projects between veterinary education establishments and veterinary statutory bodies.

The OIE's achievements over the past 90 years have made it a leading global organisation for animal health. The Global Health Security Agenda, proposed to the world by the United States of America, cites the OIE PVS Pathway for improving the performance of Veterinary Services as one of the main tools for achieving a world that is healthy and secure for all, free from the threat of infectious diseases of humans and animals.

By protecting animals we preserve our future. Rendezvous in Paris in May 2015.