Interview with Dr Bernard Vallat, Director General of the OIE, at the 16th Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, on Animal Health (RIMSA 16)

What do you expect from RIMSA 16 (the 16th Inter-American Meeting, at the Ministerial Level, on Animal Health) in the area of veterinary public health?

Recent efforts to control emerging diseases of animal origin at their source and contributions to pandemic preparedness have again highlighted the need for greater collaboration between all sectors that are involved in reducing potential zoonotic risks, including foodborne diseases.

In line with the commitments made by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, OIE and World Health Organization in their 2010 Collaboration Concept Note on addressing health risks at the human-animal-ecosystems interface, the plan is to pave the way for global collaboration that focuses on animal and public health worldwide. RIMSA provides an opportunity to translate this into a new fundamental template for cross-sector collaboration at national and regional levels that will serve as a model for other regions of the world.

How do you think the OIE can support countries taking part in RIMSA to ensure that the ‘One Health’ concept (animal-human-ecosystems interface) is managed optimally by each country’s Competent Authority?

Improving the governance of Veterinary Services, including their public and private components, as well as their interaction, coordination and cooperation with public health concerns, is the most effective way to safeguard animal and public health from diseases transmitted from animals to humans, such as rabies, or in the area of food safety.

The OIE has developed the Tool for the evaluation of Performance of Veterinary Services (OIE PVS Tool) to help countries to assess their Veterinary Services’ compliance with international quality standards.

Using the OIE PVS Tool, the OIE and other public health-related institutions can conduct pilot evaluation missions to assess the quality of national Veterinary Services and their compliance with OIE standards, placing special emphasis on collaboration, interaction and cooperation with the public health sector and other relevant stakeholders, at the animal-human interface in the countries concerned, at national, regional and local levels.

This creates an urgent need for rapid and accurate diagnosis of pathogens, data analysis, risk assessment, epidemiology and communication, in order to instigate preventive and early response measures. Efficient and credible veterinary laboratory services are key to ensuring early disease detection.

It is essential to support capacity-building and networking of veterinary laboratories. Current programmes have shown that this can be done by: expanding the network of experts for OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres; supporting the OIE laboratory twinning programme between existing OIE Reference Laboratories and candidate laboratories from developing and IN-transition countries; and focusing capacity-building workshops on issues of national and regional interest.

What sets RIMSA apart from collaborations in other parts of the world?

RIMSA is a unique regional forum, bringing together national Ministers of Agriculture and Health to address issues of common interest. It sets an example for regional coordination in applying the ‘One Health’ concept and advancing veterinary public health in countries of the region. Regional organisations in other parts of the world also act as channels of information and support for this important concept, and their role is invaluable in achieving this type of cross-sector collaboration.

RIMSA is a model that should be used all over the world.