



Official Opening Ceremony of the World Veterinary Congress

Speech by the Director General of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

Cape Town, 11 October 2011

Dr Jorna, President of the World Veterinary Association,
Representatives of the World Veterinary Association and organisers of the Congress,
OIE national Delegates,
Fellow veterinarians,
Honourable Participants,

The Executive Council of Vet2011, in charge of organising celebrations to mark the 250th anniversary of the veterinary profession, did me the very great honour of appointing me President of VET2011 right from the start.

I was deeply touched by this expression of trust and indeed greatly motivated as I have always sought to achieve the widest possible public recognition of the essential role played by our profession on behalf of society at large.

Since planning for these celebrations began, I have been working with Prof. Chary and I should like to take this opportunity today to publicly thank him and his team.

Louis XV, Bertin and Bourgelat were true visionaries who realised that their society needed veterinarians, not just as animal doctors but for their valuable contribution to public health.

Our Council has therefore worked to ensure that throughout the year 2011 priority is given to communication on all the contributions that the many different facets of the veterinary profession have made to society.

The design of the World Veterinary Congress in Cape Town complies perfectly with this vision.

I would like to take this opportunity to look ahead at the future of the veterinary profession.

The veterinarian is central to the human–animal relationship, which is so important for the future of us all.

The world's requirements, and indeed world demand, for milk, eggs, meat, leather, wool, honey, fish and crustaceans are increasing at a faster rate than economic growth and the world's population. The hundreds of millions of people in emerging countries who are now leaving behind poverty and acquiring middle class status want access to the animal protein they have been without for so long.

In most cases, animal production will intensify to meet this demand and veterinarians must be on hand to help solve the animal health, animal welfare and environmental problems that are bound to arise in both terrestrial and aquatic animal production.

Increasing urbanisation places increasing emphasis on the social benefits to be derived from animals, for companionship, sport and leisure.

Here, too, veterinarians play an essential role in monitoring the risks and opportunities associated with this development while continuing their work as animal doctors.

The emergence of health risks associated with globalisation and climate change creates an ever greater need for risk managers at international, regional and national level. Among these, veterinarians already play and will continue to play a leading role, not just at public sector level, but also at private sector level through the many practitioners working under public contract, for instance performing disease surveillance and providing a first level of alert, so that biological disasters, natural or deliberate and regardless of whether they threaten animals, humans or both, can be stopped at their source in animals.

As Bourgelat so rightly understood, veterinarians also have a role to play in advancing knowledge, teaching others and contributing to biological research. Veterinary education gives an understanding of both the normal physiological state and the pathological state. Understanding the vast complexity of the subject helps to make veterinarians resourceful but also encourages modesty and caution thereby helping them to avoid numerous potential technical or policy errors.

The development and distribution of veterinary medicines and vaccines is also an essential activity, given that parasites, bacteria, viruses and other pathogens are constantly adapting. Nevertheless, promoting and controlling their prudent use is also a priority, requiring strong mobilisation of the profession.

The veterinary profession is therefore a profession with a future. Yet the responsibilities that it carries cannot be exercised without a framework of ethics and rules. These responsibilities are too great for the veterinary profession to be left to its own devices in our globalised world.

Consequently, we must ensure that the profession is regulated at global, regional and national levels. The basic principles designed to create this regulation have already achieved a consensus of the 178 Member Countries of the OIE and are published in the form of international standards in the Organisation's *Codes*.

The core of global regulation of the veterinary profession is founded on the Veterinary Services, as defined by the OIE, namely the conjunction of the national Veterinary Authority and its staff and all those in the private sector who carry out missions in the field of animal health, animal welfare and veterinary public health, within the framework defined by the national Veterinary Authority. The international standards notably include within this field the concepts of ethics, independence and professional competence, which are essential to ensure the quality and integrity of all the missions carried out by the veterinary profession on behalf of the community and its citizens.

The OIE standards also clearly require each country to have an independent body responsible for controlling the quality and professional conduct of veterinarians practising within its borders. This is an essential measure and must be universally applied to help ensure the excellence of the profession and optimal performance of all its responsibilities, and to enable unacceptable situations to be dealt with appropriately. Lastly, the importance of the quality of initial and continuing veterinary education is highlighted in the OIE standards and safeguarding its excellence must be one of the missions of the independent statutory body.

The OIE is currently working with the world veterinary education community to develop new guidelines listing the basic minimum knowledge to be acquired by anyone wishing to join the veterinary profession.

All our Member Countries have agreed that veterinary education must also include components relating to the concept of "global public good" and not just components that respond to market forces. Over and above a good knowledge of both the normal and the pathological state, disciplines such as infectious diseases, epidemiology, animal welfare and food safety must not be overlooked, however strong market pressures and the need for more income-generating activities may be.

This basic educational content must of course be tailored to leave room for other topics relating to the cultural and economic specificities and priorities of each country or region.

The OIE presented its first proposals in Lyons, France, on 13 and 14 May 2011 in the very place where the world's first veterinary school was created.

To contribute towards the adoption and dissemination of all these key principles, the OIE is using the concepts of “global public good” and “good veterinary governance”.

The concept of “global public good” is founded on the notion of a public good as an activity that is beneficial to all people and all future generations. Such activities are eligible for support from public financial contributors and not solely from stakeholders responding to simple market laws.

The concept of “good veterinary governance” was born out of discussions following the biological disasters of recent years, such as the BSE crisis, avian influenza and the considerable damage inflicted by foot and mouth disease, among others.

The OIE has demonstrated that countries equipped with the appropriate legislation and having public and private sector components of the Veterinary Services that comply with OIE international standards of quality have been successful in the early detection and immediate eradication of outbreaks of even the most dreaded animal diseases, whether transmissible to humans or otherwise.

The effectiveness of these systems depends on their receiving adequate financial and human resources.

Countries that lack the capacity to comply with these recommendations represent a serious threat to the international community. If their situation is the result of poverty, it is the duty and in the interests of rich countries to help them comply with standards of “good veterinary governance”, the cost of prevention being ridiculously small compared to the cost of having to cope with a crisis.

The Member Countries of the OIE, strongly supported in this respect by leading development donors, such as the World Bank, the European Commission and numerous developed countries, prompted the OIE to develop a tool for evaluating the compliance of national Veterinary Services, including their public and private sector components, with duly adopted and published standards of “good veterinary governance”.

This evaluation tool, the “PVS”, is used by teams of experts trained and accredited by the OIE; 110 countries have already applied for an evaluation. This evaluation is in most cases followed by a “Gap Analysis” mission that provides the evaluated countries with programmes to help them comply with the relevant standards. These programmes include detailed costs and can be used to apply for funding, either internally or from donors. This policy is having a considerable impact at a world level and is helping to protect the international community from incipient health crises while helping the veterinary profession worldwide to fulfil its responsibilities more effectively.

However, the OIE does not claim to be able to solve alone the issues relating to governance.

We very much count on our key partners, such as FAO and WHO and public and private donors, to have a positive influence on governments and to acknowledge the importance of the veterinary components in public health programmes and agricultural production development programmes. Furthermore, I am delighted to have the opportunity to thank UNESCO and its Director General for the interest shown in all our global scientific and educational objectives, the European Union and DG SANCO for their most valuable support for VET2011 and the World Congress, and indeed all the other sponsors.

We also count on commonsense to continue to recognise that the coexistence of humans with animals, both domestic and wild, constitutes an immense but fragile wealth. Veterinarians have a considerable role to play in managing this coexistence, both today and in the future.

However, it is imperative to develop communication on the profession and its role. With the support of our Member Countries and, in particular, the European Union, we have created video communication tools, downloadable from the OIE website, illustrating all the facets of the veterinary profession. You are warmly encouraged to download them for use in your respective countries. Their use is free and they are designed in such a way that they can be offered to television channels (they have been translated into 23 languages) and any other type of screening, for example at public meetings.

Let us work together to ensure that the veterinary profession retains its excellence and fulfils all the hopes placed in it, and let us go on protecting it from all the risks that it faces.

Now I should like to congratulate the organisers of the Congress, the President, the Committee and the staff of the WVA, and all our colleagues for their participation in this key event for the veterinary profession.

Thank you for your attention.

Bernard Vallat