

# **LIBREVILLE DECLARATION ON AVIAN INFLUENZA AND THE THREAT OF A HUMAN PANDEMIC IN AFRICA**

Following the emergence and spread of avian influenza epizootics in Africa due to the highly pathogenic H5N1 (HPAI) strain and the threat of a human pandemic to the continent, agencies of the United Nations system and government representatives from 45 countries of the African Region gathered in Libreville, Gabon, from 20-22 March 2006.

The meeting was opened by His Excellency Omar Bongo Ondimba, President of the Republic of Gabon, and was attended by the Regional Directors of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN System Influenza Coordinator, the Deputy Director of the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and representatives of the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the International Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the World Food Programme (WFP), Government representatives and donors.

Following two days of deliberations, we, the participants of the United Nations Regional Meeting on Avian Influenza in Africa, having considered:

- The global risk of avian influenza due to the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain and following the spread of the epidemic from Asia to Europe and subsequently to Africa;
- The recent outbreaks of avian influenza epidemic in Nigeria, Egypt, Niger and Cameroon and the potential risk of spread of the epizootics to other countries on the continent;
- The urgent need for immediate implementation of counter-epizootic measures in the control of avian influenza outbreaks in view of its socio-economic impacts and public health significance;
- The weak or non-existent capacity for laboratory diagnosis of avian influenza virus for both animal and human health in Africa;
- The uneven levels of preparedness of the countries to cope with the threat of a human influenza pandemic;
- The serious challenge that avian and human influenza poses as it adds to the many other existing challenges such as poverty, human health (HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, etc.) and animal health (Newcastle Disease, Gumboro Fowl cholera etc.);
- The allocation of limited resources to animal and human health and the weak national institutional capacities, that seriously hinder the implementation of preparedness and response plans;
- The serious socio-economic impact of avian influenza control, in particular of the systematic culling recommended by Governments;

- The major decisions taken at global level in Washington DC, USA (September 2005), Ottawa, Canada (October 2005), Geneva, Switzerland (November 2005) and Beijing, China (January 2006) and at the continental level in Kigali, Rwanda (November 2005), Brazzaville, Republic of Congo (January 2006) and N'djamena, Chad (February 2006);
1. **Declare** the need for a firm political commitment at the highest level of Government and to ensure multi-sectoral coordination at the supra-ministerial level for the development of plans, the mobilization of resources, implementation and monitoring of plans in close collaboration with community-based organizations, NGOs, civil society and other actors;
  2. **Declare** the need for each country to give priority to the finalisation of an integrated, consolidated and multi-sectoral avian influenza and human pandemic preparedness and response plans;
  3. **Declare** the need for exchange of experiences and lessons learned including those of Asia and Europe in the preparedness and response to avian influenza outbreaks;
  4. **Encourage** countries to implement coherent programmes of public communication and awareness-raising in order to reduce the risk of spread of the epizootics and transmission of the disease to humans. These communication programmes should be developed in consultation with affected people;
  5. **Call on** African countries to promptly notify the relevant international organisations, in accordance with the International Health Regulation (2005) and the Terrestrial Animal Health Code (2005), notably the OIE, WHO, FAO, AU-IBAR (African Union – Inter-African Bureau of Animal Resources);
  6. **Declare** that countries should stringently enforce the recommended avian influenza disease control measures as indicated in the FAO/OIE Global Strategy for the Progressive Control of HPAI, such as stamping out (systematic culling of poultry), adoption of the requisite bio-security measures, animal/vehicular movement controls and targeted or mass vaccination if cases of HPAI are detected;
  7. **Declare** that countries should ensure timely socio-economic and alternative livelihood studies are conducted leading to the establishment of relevant programmes for affected areas;
  8. **Invite** countries to take into account the re-stocking of poultry in consultation with the poultry farmer associations, civil society and other stakeholders;
  9. **Declare** that countries should put in place incentives such as compensation funds and schemes for affected farmers;
  10. **Declare** that African countries should urgently evaluate and strengthen their veterinary services in order to ensure the prompt detection, investigation and response in particular to avian influenza suspicions and epizootics in domestic poultry and migratory/resident wild bird populations;
  11. **Declare** that all African countries should strengthen their human health surveillance systems for prompt detection, investigation and response in the

event of human infection by the H5N1 virus and human to human transmission;

12. **Stress** that countries should establish and strengthen collaboration between public health systems and animal health systems to provide a uniform platform and standard procedures for the avoidance of human flu pandemic;
13. **Affirm** the dire need to strengthen the capacities and increase, by at least three each, the number of national and reference veterinary and human health laboratories in Africa, so as to enhance their ability to carry out reliable H and N sub-typing of the influenza virus;
14. **Appeal** to the International Aviation and Transport Agency to request airlines to facilitate transportation of specimens to reference laboratories and collaborating centers;
15. **Urge** the United Nations system to strengthen the capacity of their Country Teams to provide substantial support to the countries as they formulate and implement integrated multi-sectoral plans for responding to the avian influenza;
16. **Reaffirm** the need for countries and the international community to mobilize additional technical and financial resources locally and internationally and to put in place mechanisms to facilitate rapid access to funds for the implementation of integrated plans;
17. **Call on** the international community and manufacturers of antivirals, protective equipment, vaccines (animal/human), and other supplies to make these products accessible to Africa;
18. **Decide** to create a follow up committee comprised of representatives of United Nations agencies, OIE, AU and United Nations Secretariat for Influenza Coordination (UNSIC) to monitor the recommendations emanating from this meeting, particularly those concerning national preparedness and response plans, the mobilization of resources, the coordination between animal and human health experts; the socio-economic aspects, the stocking of protective equipment, anti-viral drugs including antiviral medicines, vaccines, disinfectants, etc.

*Done in Libreville, Gabon on 22 March 2006*