



## **UN System Influenza Coordination**

### **Report of participation in the World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland 25<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> January 2006**

**David Nabarro: UN System Influenza Coordinator**

1 For four days (25 – 29 January) Davos was occupied by several hundred senior executives of companies, plus a number of Heads of State, many Government Ministers and some senior government officials from developing and developed country governments. They were joined by European Commissioners, heads of several International NGOs, UN systems agencies and development banks, senior media and PR executives, diplomats and several well known artists and artistes. There were more than 200 programmed events on commercial, economic, political and development issues, many meetings of chief executives from different sectoral groups (e.g. health, travel and tourism, entertainment) and many more networking events. Health, environment and development issues featured in many of the programmed and private sessions, including the World Economic Forum's Health Initiative (running for more than five years, with a principle focus on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria), work on neglected diseases, the millennium development goals, prospects for Africa (involving the President of Mozambique, Bill Gates and Bono) and pandemic preparedness. They had to compete with the focus on India and China, dialogue about the Hamas victory in Palestinian elections, and concerns about slow employment growth in the West – accompanied by record high oil prices.

2 I worked with staff of the World Economic Forum as they developed a set of both programmed and private sessions that focused on how private entities, governments, international bodies (like CARE international and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement) and the media can work together to improve responses to avian influenza and enable communities to better prepare for the next influenza pandemic. The sessions concentrated on:

- Threats to continuity of business, economies and governance posed by the avian influenza panzootic (the animal equivalent of a pandemic) and by the threat of human pandemics;
- The challenges faced by government, the business community, the health sector, intergovernmental bodies and the media when trying to work together to address pandemics;
- The specific difficulties faced by airlines, and the travel and tourism industries, the concerns of the financial services and insurance industries, the potential contributions of health sector companies and the willingness of professionals in media organizations to contribute to the response to pandemics
- The potential advantages of involving the private sector, media, and NGOs alongside governments, and the important role of the UN in catalysing such partnerships.

3 I was asked to participate in a number of sessions in my role as UN System Influenza Coordinator: Ann Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF, Kathy Bushkin, United Nations Foundation, Elena Salgado, Minister of Health of Spain, Geoffrey Lipman, Special Adviser to the Secretary General at the World Tourism Organization, and Dr Tony Fauci, Director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases in the US National Institute for Health, played substantive roles in several of the sessions: it was good that we were able to work together. Discussions at this WEF meeting identified five areas in which action is desired, though



## UN System Influenza Coordination

much of this action will be taken forward in other local, national and international settings. We also started to examine ways in which the WEF could make a unique additional contribution.

### **A Analyses of risks associated with avian influenza and potential pandemics:**

4 A study undertaken by Marsh McLennan, Merrill Lynch and Swiss Re, in association with the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, on behalf of the World Economic Forum, identified and assessed current and emerging global risks in the 2006 and 2015 time horizons. The four principle risks identified are a dramatic rise in the price of oil (to more than \$80 per barrel), terrorism, climate change and an influenza pandemic. One CEO told me that they reckon the pandemic risk to be 6% per year.

5 Major businesses in all sectors, government and media groups indicated that they would like real time access to reliable (accurate and precise) authoritative up-to-date information on the situation and risks to human and animal health. They anticipate that this information would be based on epidemiology, serology, virology and molecular biology, and be informed by previous influenza-related experiences, where these are available. They would value informed interpretations that help them make decisions that help them do the best they can to ensure the continuity of their businesses and the well being of their employees. They would like to be able to contribute positively to the wider public both through the efforts of their staff (at all levels) and the goods and services that they produce.

6 Companies want to be reassured that the UN system has systems in place for regularly updating risk assessments, in close cooperation with Governments, and for subjecting these assessments to peer review. They would like a single source for the risk information, and accessible spokespersons available to help them interpret the information in responsible ways so that commercial and other decisions, when taken, reflect the best available evidence and expert judgement.

### **B Need to intensify changes in behaviour that reduce risks of avian influenza and a human pandemic**

7 Participants on the discussions about pandemic risk reflected on the extent of the threat that avian influenza poses both to poor communities and to the commercial poultry industry. They concluded that commercial organizations should support efforts by governments, UN system agencies and NGOs both to catalyse and to sustain changes in behaviour that will reduce risk to individuals and communities. Some had heard about the recent tripartite meeting in Bangkok that has triggered intense efforts by around three quarters of a million persons employed by a group of companies (mostly involved in the international meat production, marketing, distribution and sales business) in Asia to work in support of governments and NGOs in the region. Their focus is both on animal health and changing behaviour in ways that reduce risk.

8 During both public and private meetings in Davos there was interest in UNICEF's and NGOs' efforts to help people get wise about the dangers posed by birds, and about ways in which they can protect health in the event of a pandemic. Participants in the health sector governors' meeting asked about initiatives to maximise the production of effective face masks (to be taken



## UN System Influenza Coordination

up by a possible WEF initiative). Participants suggested that a broad range of companies – including, but not limited to the media – should be engaged in a global communications campaign, perhaps by working in support of UNICEF and drawing on the key messages that have been approved by WHO and FAO.

### **C Improved animal health through ensuring better biosecurity in farms and backyards, and veterinary infrastructure that meets international standards**

9 Government representatives spoke of the challenges they face with regard to identifying outbreaks of influenza among birds and other animals, and the need both to scale up veterinary services quickly and to reform of poultry rearing techniques from back yard to farm and to market. Participants sought information about UN system plans to help upgrade animal health and were interested in the potential for private sector support (eg through supplying skilled personnel, assistance with distance learning, backup for accreditation of vet services and help to maintain biosecurity). Those in the food industry spoke of their interest in high standards of animal health as a critical requirement for the confidence of consumers and of their workforce. (This issue has been taken up in later meetings by the Dutch Government and the Wildlife Conservation Society...is Veterinarians sans Frontieres engaged, they ask?).

### **D Human Health Surveillance and readiness for prompt containment of a suspected pandemic**

10 Participants in the health governors' meeting recognised the challenges faced by countries as they attempt to upgrade their national human health surveillance capacity in countries (though were inspired by the account of SARS experience from the participating Minister from Singapore). Another Minister referred to the importance of cell phones as a means through which field health staff can get in touch with the centre. All agreed that effective surveillance is difficult in highly decentralized settings especially if local and district staff fear that they will actually be penalised for reporting bad news...Careful motivation will be needed.

11 On containment, participants in several sessions were reassured to hear that WHO has issued a protocol for rapid response and that this is backed up by the (just approved) international health regulations. They were gratified to hear that WHO is developing regional stocks of essential medicines (including oseltamivir) and protective clothing, and that there are plans for a rapid intervention team to respond to rumours of early pandemic. They seem comfortable with WHO being the body which indicates whether or not there is a pandemic, though are aware that the period between the first signs of a possible pandemic start-up and its confirmation by WHO will be marked by a great deal of anticipation by companies seeking to move personnel and goods before possible border closures or the cessation of commercial airline traffic. Some media groups have prepared themselves so that they will be in a position to move as close as possible to the centre of a suspected pandemic and thus be able to provide real time broadcast material.

### **E Preparedness for response to a pandemic phase 6 should containment not be successful**



## UN System Influenza Coordination

12 During one private event, a group of WEF participants worked in four groups (government, health sector, business and international organizations) to make strategic decisions in relation to a pandemic which had been active for 40 days. They were focusing on a Western European nation whose people had displayed influenza symptoms for a total of 28 days: absenteeism and anxiety had led to large reductions in workforces, and hampered the provision of essential services and utilities. Health services were heavily loaded in several urban centres. A fifth group, the media, provided a commentary on the actions taken by the other four: mid way through the simulation it became clear that participants had found it hard to grasp the extent to which in-country services had been affected as a result of the pandemic. They did agree that the public should be kept as fully informed as possible of the situation and the actions that they could take to reduce risk (and the idea of “flucasters”, who broadcast on the state of pandemic, was floated).

13 The general conclusion was that such simulations are critical to enable senior executives, media, voluntary governments and government departments prepare fully (a) for continuity of life and livelihoods, economy and governance, and (b) speedy post-pandemic recovery. Executives from airlines, travel and tourism, and from banking and financial services, concluded that they not only need to be sure that their contingency plans are realistic, but that they also link with the contingency planning of the authorities in countries where they have operations. Some kind of pandemic-related “state of emergency” is likely to be invoked in affected countries, and business executives should be ready (and willing) to be co-opted into efforts to maintain life and livelihoods under these circumstances. The simulation will be run again, by Booz Allen (who developed it) in Washington DC at the end of March. In subsequent discussions I have seen how this kind of simulation can be developed, using “system dynamics” techniques, to model the impact of different decisions (and decision timings) on the evolution of various patterns of pandemic, and the economic, social and political impacts of these decisions. Such interactive models will provide useful follow-up “decision making practice” for senior executives in government, the private sector, the NGO community and the media.

14 Some participants had heard that WHO is producing guidance for contingency planning by businesses and wondered when (or indeed if) this guidance will be made available.

### **F Product Development**

15 During the programmed session on January 28<sup>th</sup> there was much interest from participants regarding the potential for (a) improving international capacity to produce an effective vaccine once the characteristics of the pandemic virus are known, (b) developing a more sophisticated “all influenza virus” vaccine based on a common antigen, (c) producing rapid diagnostic methods using saliva that are both sensitive and specific, and (d) increasing production of neuraminidase-inhibiting antivirals. Only one of the two research-based manufacturers of these preparations was represented. There were mixed views as to whether the current sub-licensing strategy will lead to a sufficiently rapid increase in production, but one minister was clear – if the government is to order generic oseltamivir, it must be certified as effective and safe either by the parent manufacturer or by WHO. The kinds of incentives needed for the influenza vaccine production industry to scale up production capacity for a “one time” vaccine were also discussed, drawing on the experience of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. Several specific proposals were made for strong leadership by WHO. There was less discussion in this meeting on products needed for reducing H5N1 among chickens (though this need was seen as critical by several who



## UN System Influenza Coordination

spoke). Means for distributing any vaccine that does become available should be discussed and agreed before the pandemic starts. I met executives of several companies with potential rapid diagnostic agents under development (and mentioned that venture capitalists are actively looking for potential investment opportunities in these areas).

### Follow Up

16 Although participants from the private sector clearly saw value in working together on several of the issues raised, no specific plans were developed for a particular initiative by the WEF. Instead, there may be a need to there to be an opportunity for senior company, government, NGO, media and international agency figures to be able to maintain dialogue by phone – and occasionally in person – to discuss complex issues that will benefit from this kind of interactive examination. An existing web site could be used to highlight examples of novel practice in any of the six areas identified above (or others that may have been omitted). Discussion with the key figures in existing initiatives – such as the WEF Global Health Initiative – would indicate the extent to which they might also take on influenza issues without being undermined.

17 Two existing WEF initiatives could usefully get engaged in influenza. The first is being taken forward by the Aviation, Travel and Tourism industry which has proved, in recent years, to be especially vulnerable to risks (such as SARS, violent attacks and natural disasters). The WEF, the UN World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO) and several industry stakeholders have agreed to launch a Global Risk Network which will provide a central “portal” through which all stakeholders can receive integrated and validated information on risks (the *Global Risk Network*). During Davos it became evident that the same network might be used to inform stakeholders from this industry about risks associated with avian influenza and – when it appears – an influenza pandemic, so that they can best protect their clients and workforce (and, if feasible, contribute to reduction in human suffering). To this end, the UN-WTO is seconding a staff member to work in WHO as liaison between the two organizations. Close links are also maintained between UN-WTO and ICAO: they will be discussing Pandemic issues with other stakeholders in Singapore early in February. (Key contact – Geoffrey Lipman, UN-WTO, and Thea Chiesa, WEF)

18 The second initiative – the *WEF disaster relief network* (set up to enable enterprises – large and small – to assist in disasters like the Asian Tsunami) would provide a useful mechanism through which dialogue in the forum between multinational companies could be shared with national and local enterprises, particularly in Pakistan, India and Mexico (where the initiative has been active) and in China, Vietnam, Indonesia and other countries currently affected by avian influenza. (Key contact on this is Robert Bellhouse of the WEF).

19 There will be further discussion of follow-up with WEF staff in the next few weeks: I would personally wish to stay engaged in this work for at least four working days in the next 12 months: we hope soon to be able to identify a liaison person in the UN system Influenza Coordination Office.