

International Ministerial Conferences on Avian and Pandemic Influenza

Session 1: 25th October 2008: “Setting the Scene”

**HPAI and Pandemic Preparedness:
Review of progress using the New Delhi Road map**

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Excellencies, Colleagues and Friends

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Egypt for convening and hosting this sixth in a series of International Ministerial Conferences on Avian and Pandemic Influenza. I also am pleased to thank the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza and the European Commission for their crucial support.

I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to Dr. Abdel-Nasser Abdel-Ghafar, a leader of Egyptian Ministry of Health disease surveillance programme and a critical organizer for this conference. Dr. Abdel-Nasser passed away suddenly four months ago. I, like many, miss his commitment, good humor and dedication. All of us within the UN system, and our partner organizations, regret that he cannot be with us today.

I would like to recognize the hard work by officials in the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture of the Government of Egypt who have carried on his work and brought this conference together. I thank their Excellencies the Ministers of Health and Agriculture for their outstanding leadership.

Today’s gathering of Ministers and senior officials from national authorities and International Organizations follows similar political meetings in Washington, Beijing, Vienna, Bamako and New Delhi since October 2005. It builds on the November 2005 partners technical meeting organized by FAO, OIE, the World Bank and WHO in Geneva in 2005, and the follow up event in Rome in June 2007.

These conferences are part of an evolution. They have provided a platform on which national governments show the world how they are acting - together - in response to HPAI and preparation for a pandemic. They have demonstrated what has been achieved and what would need further attention. Now, on October 25th 2008, in the beautiful city of Sharm El Sheikh, our minds are focused.

Over the next two days we will ask ourselves

1. How best to ensure that the world is ready to cope with diseases that can trigger a pandemic or other surprising health events?
2. How to sustain efforts to control HPAI, especially in poultry; and – eventually – to eradicate it?
3. How to initiate longer term action in response to infectious diseases that emerge at the interface between animals and humans, within different ecosystems, that are capable of causing severe damage and affecting livelihoods?

Responding to HPAI and the threat of a pandemic: the trend

Since the **Washington** conference three years ago, we have seen a progression in the understanding, analysis and articulation of the threats we face and in adapting our response and preparation.

When the international community gathered in **Beijing** in January 2006 it adopted the following vision:

- a) Control highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry, and reduce the risks that this disease poses for members of the human population exposed to it;
- b) Watch out for sustained human to human transmission of highly pathogenic influenza through vastly improved surveillance, and be ready to contain it; and
- c) Mitigate the impact of a pandemic on human health, society, economic systems, livelihoods and governance.

In **Vienna**, in June 2006, the principles of this vision were sustained but emphasis started to shift to the multi-sectoral dimensions of pandemic preparedness: it was seen as broader than a health issue. There was increasing emphasis on Communication for public information and social mobilization, and UNICEF (with dedicated support from the Government of Japan) became increasingly involved [we acknowledge the personal engagement of Executive Director Ann Veneman in this work]. Regional political organizations also indicated their intention to be more engaged in support of country level work.

In **Bamako**, in December 2006, the previous principles were further reaffirmed. At the same time, the outcomes being pursued started to combine the urgent with the longer term - addressing complex challenges of sustaining avian influenza control and responses to a pandemic. In addition, an emphasis was given to the need to intensify responses in Africa and the dedicated resources that would be needed for this to happen.

At the conclusion of the December 2007 International Ministerial Conference in **New Delhi**, the Government of India produced a road map that reflected best practice so as to guide nations' efforts for controlling avian influenza and preparing for the next pandemic. Emphasis was given to the convergence of animal and human health actions "One World One Health".

The Road map set out objectives that countries might seek to achieve during 2008 and introduced the need for convergence between animal and human health to respond to emerging diseases of animal origin as a contribution to the concept (developed by the Wildlife Conservation Society) of "One World, One Health". International organizations were asked to prepare a strategic framework and consider options for its implementation. India's vision served as a useful tool for national planning, program development and progress assessment during 2008.

And now, here, in **Sharm El Sheik**, we have the opportunity again to review experiences and discuss the way forward.

The UN system and World Bank Progress Report: confirming the trend

The UN system and World Bank have just released their fourth *Progress Report on Responses to Avian Influenza and State of Pandemic Readiness*. It assesses worldwide progress over the past year and offers some suggested next steps. This Progress Report, compiled with responses from 148 countries and key inputs from FAO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNOCHA, WHO and other agencies, focuses on assessing progress between June 2007 and June 2008. It also looks back over the last three years.

The report draws on objectives developed throughout the international conferences, as highlighted in the New Delhi Road Map.

For example, in the Road Map countries are encouraged to ‘prepare operational plans as a key to an effective response’. The report concludes that we have now seen global evidence of action for both HPAI and in preparation for a pandemic. Considering that pandemic preparedness was largely unaddressed by the world’s nations only three years ago, the widespread awareness and action seen today is a major achievement. Conferences like this which stimulate collective action at national and regional levels have played a major part in nurturing this global movement. But good preparation calls for operational, multi-sectoral and well-tested plans – and many countries have not managed to reach that stage yet.

The Road Map also identified ‘Strengthening animal and human surveillance and response’ as a priority. Despite the advances that have been reported, the responses tallied in the report reveal that in many countries animal and human health systems have further to go and still need support to reach the desired standard.

The need for a ‘broadened scope of pandemic preparedness’ was also highlighted in the Road Map. However, most countries have neither developed multi-sectoral plans nor planned for continuity of essential services.

Whilst there is evidence of significant advances in national authorities' abilities to respond to HPAI and prepare for a pandemic, there remain significant inconsistencies and gaps globally. The world as a whole has **NOT YET** fully realized the ambitious objectives developed through three years of international conferences. But we are on the way and have a chance to help each other to move onwards and upwards.

The way ahead

So, today we convene again to assess progress, develop our understanding of the issues at hand and discuss how we should move forward.

In my view the way ahead does not mean changing what we do – it means continuing to do what is right (and doing more of it). Supporting each other to achieve results is an exciting and rewarding process: it calls for collective effort and concerted actions. I would like to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of national governments, many of whom are represented here, who have worked with other stakeholders to prepare for a pandemic and develop the ability to control HPAI. I look forward to hearing the vision of the Government of Egypt. Many of your governments have helped others – through the work of regional bodies (such as the AU, EU, ASEAN, APEC, SAARC, the SPC and the Andean Community) and international organizations. I am glad several of these regional bodies, and regional development banks – are represented here. I pay tribute, too, to WHO, FAO, OIE, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, OCHA, ICAO, ILO, UNWTO, UNHCR, IOM, the World Bank, Civil Society bodies, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, numerous private sector entities and hundreds of journalists who have taken the pandemic threat seriously. All have worked together, with national governments, in pursuit of a common agenda - responding to the reality of HPAI and the potential damage that would be caused by influenza pandemics.

This three year process has taught us that several factors are key for our collective success. They include:

- High level political commitment to pandemic preparedness .
- The ability to identify priority actions and scale them up rapidly.
- Joint working of veterinary and human health services, with sharing of information.
- Incentives that respond to the needs of poorer people, encourage immediate reporting of outbreaks and help to sustain livelihoods.
- Effective strategic alliances between civil society, private sector, and government, and joint work by neighboring countries.
- Open and honest communication on ways to avoid the pandemic threat and means to reduce risks due to HPAI (these require quite different communication strategies).

I would like to add the importance of research, product development and transfer of technology as a seventh factor.

All of these factors need regular review in the light of the evolving context.

At the beginning of my address I mentioned as key areas of focus the need to:

1. Ensure that the world is ready to cope with diseases that can trigger a pandemic or other surprising health events
2. Sustain efforts to control HPAI, especially in poultry; and – eventually – to eradicate it
3. Initiate longer term action in response to infectious diseases that emerge at the interface between animals and humans, within different ecosystems, that are capable of causing severe damage and affecting livelihoods

At this time, there is an even greater need for sustained and high level political commitment; for investing in better animal and human health services; and effective

alliances with civil society and private sector. And we need operational research to better monitor the state of pandemic preparedness.

In conclusion, let us remember that a pandemic of some kind remains inevitable, but we do not know *when* it will happen, from *where* it will come or *how severe* it will be. We are all dealing with risk and uncertainty – coping with, preparing for and communicating about unknown, and trying to avoid an unexpected public health disaster. We have a parallel, and it is here with us now. The financial crisis is provoking widespread gloom and anxiety. It also provides us with a moment for reflection and learning. We are witnessing the global impact of a threat which was unforeseen by most and for which the world was ill prepared: a threat which will compound the challenges already faced by the world's most vulnerable people.

But things would have been far worse had the world, in late 2008, been hit by an influenza pandemic, with its dramatic consequences for people, communities, economies and humanity. We are not yet in a position to mitigate these consequences: had it happened, we would never have been forgiven for failing to establish robust preparedness. So let us sustain the struggle and make our world fully pandemic ready in 2009. After all, we have been warned.