MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND STOCKPILING OF BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

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THE WORLD ORGANIZATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH (OIE)[1]

Prepared by the Secretariat

Introduction

1. The OIE was founded by international arrangement in 1924, before the creation of the United Nations. Initially 28 founder countries united with a mandate to share information on animal disease outbreaks to allow the Member Countries to take the appropriate control methods to protect themselves and to prevent further spread of the disease. There are now 167 OIE Member Countries. Preventing the spread of animal diseases and zoonoses is accomplished by establishing international standards and guidelines aimed at preventing the importation of pathogens dangerous for animals and humans while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers and through national surveillance, notification and control methods of diseases. The main OIE objectives and activities are focused on the following areas:

- Transparency in animal disease status worldwide: each OIE Member Country is committed to report to the OIE headquarters on its health status regarding significant animal diseases including diseases transmissible to humans (zoonosis). The OIE then disseminates the information to all Member Countries to enable them to take appropriate action and to protect themselves.

- Collection, analysis and dissemination of veterinary information: using its network of internationally recognised scientists, Collaborating centres and Reference laboratories, the OIE collects, analyses and publishes the latest scientific information on significant animal diseases, including zoonosis, especially regarding surveillance, control and prevention methods.
- Strengthening of international coordination and cooperation in the control of animal diseases: the OIE provides technical expertise to Member Countries requesting assistance with animal disease prevention, control and eradication programmes,

[1] *The following was provided to the Secretariat by the OIE. It supplements the information contained in paragraphs 48 - 51 of background paper BWC/MSP/2004/MX/INF.2.*

particularly in developing countries. These activities are performed in coordination with and in support to other Regional and International Organisations and with donors committed to supporting and funding the international development. Under OIE-World Bank Official Agreement, surveillance of animal disease is recognised as an international Public Good.

- Sanitary protection of world trade in animals and animal products while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers: the OIE develops standards for use by the Member Countries to protect themselves. These standards are developed by experts from Member Countries administrations and by experts selected from the OIE's network of 170 Collaborating Centres and Reference Laboratories. These laboratories are part of a worldwide network which provides to the OIE all scientific information relevant for control methods of all OIE listed diseases and zoonoses and organise training programmes for other laboratories staff in Member Countries. The list of Reference laboratories is voted annually by the annual assembly of OIE Member Countries. Currently, 31 Member Countries host Reference laboratories and Collaborating centres of the OIE. In 1995, standards developed by the OIE were recognised by the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

OIE Structure

International Committee

2. The International Committee is the highest authority of the OIE. It comprises all the Delegates nominated by the governments of 167 Member Countries (as of May 2004) and meets once a year. Voting by the Delegates respects the democratic principle of one country, one vote. Some of the functions of the International Committee are:

- To adopt international standards in the field of animal health and zoonoses;
- To adopt guidelines and resolutions for the control of the major animal diseases;
- To elect members of the OIE's statutory bodies, Commissions of experts and the Director General of the OIE.

During the annual Session, changes affecting the distribution of the major animal diseases throughout the world are closely monitored.

OIE Regional Commissions and Representations

3. The five OIE Regional Commissions study specific problems affecting animal diseases, zoonoses and the implementation of measures by the national Veterinary Services and organise cooperation between Member Countries and other Regional Organisations within each of the Regions:

- Africa
- Americas
- Asia, Far East and Oceania
- Europe

- Middle East

4. The Regional Commissions report on their activities and submit policy recommendations for final endorsement by the general assembly before implementation by the Director General. OIE Regional activities are coordinated by 5 permanent OIE Regional Representations in: Europe (Sofia, Bulgaria); Middle East (Beirut, Lebanon); Africa (Bamako, Mali); Asia and Oceania (Tokyo, Japan) and Americas (Buenos Aires, Argentina). OIE permanent Representatives are under the authority of the OIE Director General.

The Director General and the Central Bureau

5. The Central Bureau, located in Paris (France), is managed by the Director General of the OIE. He is elected by the Delegates. The Director General implements the policies voted by Delegates. The Central Bureau implements preparation of standards and guidelines and provides the impetus for regional activities such as organising regional capacity building activities and coordinating diseases control programmes in the world. The Central Bureau has become an international resource centre at the service of animal health officials worldwide.

Towards Greater Transparency in the Animal Health Situation Worldwide

6. The OIE is the official worldwide observatory for animal health. It is supported in this mandate by the United Nations through FAO and WHO. Its key mission is to keep national Veterinary Services and International Organisations informed of the appearance and course of animal diseases and zoonosis in any country in the world that represent a threat to animal or public health. The system is based on official animal disease information that the Veterinary Authorities of OIE Member Countries have an obligation to report to the OIE. The use of common reporting forms ensures that the system is fed with the required data in a standardised format. The strength of the OIE Animal Disease Information System is its 'legal' basis defined in the OIE *Terrestrial Code* and in the OIE *Aquatic Code*. These standards are also recognised by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The OIE Animal Health Information System has the following components:

- The OIE International Early Warning System, which consists of an alert procedure to warn of exceptional epidemiological events (natural or intentional) occurring in Member Countries. Information is aimed at decision-makers and other stakeholders to enable them to take the necessary preventive measures. Under this system, the occurrence of a disease or any exceptional epidemiological event, must be reported as soon as possible to the OIE Headquarters, which then redistributes the information through a variety of channels. Follow-up reports are provided weekly to allow end-users to follow the epidemiological situation as it develops.

- The International Monitoring System, with procedures for gathering monthly and annual animal health data from developed and developing countries in the world. Periodical information is collected for all OIE-listed diseases having the potential for rapid spread, adverse economic impact or having a zoonotic potential, while annual information is collected for 130 listed infectious animal diseases and zoonoses.

- To improve the transparency of animal health information, OIE is developing a verification procedure for non-official information from various sources on the existence of diseases outbreaks that have not yet been officially notified to the OIE. These processes use different sources of information such as such as diagnostic results from Reference Laboratories, scientific papers, field projects, newspapers, internet, Global Public Health Intelligence (GPHIN), ProMed network, Empres (in developing countries), etc.

- In order to improve the control of highly contagious diseases, OIE and FAO have recently developed with the support of WHO a new initiative, called the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs). The concept of this initiative is based on a regional and international approach to animal diseases control. The Global Early Warning System (GLEWS) and response is an important component of the GF-TADs programme. The GLEWS is defined as an instrument to be developed by FAO/OIE/WHO to assist in predicting and preventing livestock animal disease threats through epidemiological analysis. The most important action is to share information on animal health/zoonoses in humans among the three organisations. Results of disease information tracking systems are shared in order to search for additional information for verification purposes. OIE through its verification system would verify information with the official Delegate of the Member Country. This will significantly improve the quality of official information which will be shared among OIE, FAO and WHO through the GLEWS System.

OIE Global Early Warning System and Emergency Response

7. The warning systems operated by the OIE Central Bureau and FAO Headquarters allow Member Countries to react rapidly if the need arises. A country detecting the first outbreak of an OIE listed disease, the re-occurrence of a listed disease, the first occurrence of a new strain of a pathogen, the sudden and unexpected increase in the distribution, incidence, morbidity or mortality of a disease prevalent within the country, an emerging disease with significant morbidity and mortality or zoonotic potential and the evidence of change in the epidemiology of a listed disease (including host range, pathogenicity, strain), must be declared by the corresponding Member Country to the OIE Central Bureau within 24 hours. This information is immediately relayed by the OIE to the other Member Countries by fax or e-mail to countries directly threatened, and through the weekly publication *Disease Information*.

8. Member Countries are also committed to sending weekly reports subsequent to a notification as above, to provide further information on the evolution of the situation. Periodical notification reports (monthly and annually) are sent by Member Countries on the presence or absence of other animal diseases of the OIE list.

9. These warning systems will provide a transparent worldwide surveillance network for the early detection and rapid reporting of any suspicious disease occurrence that could have its origin naturally or in an act of intentional introduction of pathogens (agroterrorism or bioterrorism)**.**

10. The OIE annual compilation entitled *World Animal Health*, receives the official support and cooperation of WHO and FAO through an official arrangement and provides a wide variety

of information on the animal health situation worldwide and reports on the disease control methods used by Member Countries.

11. A summary of all this information is integrated into *Handistatus* – a regularly updated computerised database available on the OIE Web site (www.oie.int). Scientific information on control methods is disseminated through the OIE *Scientific and Technical Review* which contains articles and guidelines of the very highest standard for animal disease control.

12. OIE has a source of emergency funds for use in rapidly assisting Member Countries faced with exceptional epidemiological situations. Typically, these funds are used to send experts from OIE Reference Laboratories or Collaborating Centres immediately to assess the epidemiological situation in the field and prepare the actions of national authorities and other international organisations.

Towards Improved Health Safeguards in International Trade

13. The WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures advocates the use of standards developed under the auspices of the OIE. Various normative works, approved by the OIE International Committee, are designed to promote the harmonisation of regulations applicable to trade and animal disease control. Standards are updated annually by Commissions elected by the General Assembly of the Member Countries of the OIE. Countries implementing standards for access to international trade also have to harmonize their national legislations in order to comply with surveillance and early warning international obligations.

14. Furthermore, The *Terrestrial Manual* and the *Aquatic Manual* present standard methods for diagnostic tests and vaccine production to be applied notably in the context of international trade through national animal disease control programmes. Both texts constitute the reference standards for the international harmonisation of the diagnosis methods of animal diseases and vaccine quality control; they also contain specific chapters on sampling methods, packaging and transport of samples, quality management and biosecurity of veterinary laboratories, human safety in the veterinary microbiology laboratory, disinfection and inactivation procedures and laboratory methodologies for bacterial antimicrobial susceptibility testing.

15. The OIE *Quality Standard and Guidelines for Veterinary Laboratories: Infectious diseases* publication is an OIE guideline describing the standards for the management, biosecurity and technical requirements for laboratories conducting tests for infectious diseases as well as specific details with respect to test methods validation, reference reagents and laboratory proficiency testing. Lastly, the OIE, officially develops and updates lists of countries recognised as being free from some important diseases, most notably foot-and-mouth disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, rinderpest and contagious bovine pleuropneumonia. These lists make a substantial contribution to the health security of international movements of animals and products.

Conclusion

16. In conclusion, all OIE existing tools described in paragraphs 6-15 above are relevant, when implemented by countries, to detect and to face both natural and intentional disease events.

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