

ALMATY DECLARATION ON AVIAN INFLUENZA AND THE THREAT OF A HUMAN PANDEMIC IN CAREC-COUNTRIES, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND TURKMENISTAN

Following the emergence and spread of avian influenza epizootics due to the highly pathogenic H5N1 (HPAI) strain and the threat of a human pandemic, agencies of the United Nations, the international donor community, other international organizations, and government representatives from 10 countries gathered in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on June 12-13 2006 for the “Regional Conference on Avian Influenza Control and Human Influenza Pandemic Preparedness and Response” (hereafter “Regional Conference”). The 10 countries include the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan, and 8 Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) countries: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, the People’s Republic of China (with focus on Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

The meeting was opened by Anatoliy Aleksandrovich Belonog, the Principal State Sanitary Doctor & Chairman of the State Sanitary-Epidemiological Surveillance Committee, Ministry of Health of Kazakhstan. It was attended by experts and senior officials from international agencies and multilateral financial institutions, including ADB, CDC, the European Commission, ECDC, FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNSIC, USAID, WHO, World Bank, and World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

Following two days of deliberations, we, the participants of the “Regional Conference”, from the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan and from the eight CAREC-countries, having considered:

- The global risk of avian influenza due to the highly pathogenic H5N1 virus strain and following the spread of the epizootic from Asia to Europe and subsequently to Africa;
- The recent outbreaks of avian influenza among birds in some of the countries participating in the “Regional Conference”, and the potential risk of spread of the epizootic to disease-free countries;
- The urgent need for immediate implementation of counter-epizootic and counter-epidemic measures for the control of the spread of avian influenza in view of its socio-economic impacts and public health significance;
- The weak capacity for laboratory diagnosis of avian influenza for both animal and human health in most of the countries participating in the “Regional Conference”;
- The uneven levels of preparedness of these countries for a human influenza pandemic;
- The serious challenge that avian and human influenza poses as it adds to the many other existing challenges related to poverty, human health (HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, etc.), and animal health;
- The allocation of insufficient resources to animal and human health which seriously hinder the implementation of preparedness and response plans;
- The serious socio-economic impact of avian influenza;

- The major decisions taken at the global level in Geneva, Switzerland (November 2005), Beijing, China (January 2006), and Vienna, Austria (June 2006), and at the regional level in Urumqi, PR China (April 2006);
1. **Declare** the need for a firm political commitment at the highest level of Government to ensure multi-sectoral coordination at the supra-ministerial level for the development of plans, the mobilization of resources, the implementation and monitoring of plans in close collaboration with community-based organizations, NGOs, civil society, private sector and other actors;
 2. **Declare** the need for each country to give priority to the finalization and subsequent implementation of an integrated, consolidated, and multi-sectoral avian influenza and human influenza pandemic preparedness and response plan;
 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 programs of public communication and awareness-raising in order to reduce the risk of spread of the epizootic and transmission of the disease to humans;
 5. **Call on** CAREC-countries, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan to promptly notify the relevant international organizations, in accordance with the International Health Regulations (2005) and the Terrestrial Animal Health Code (2005), notably the WHO, OIE, FAO;
 6. **Declare** that countries should stringently enforce the recommended avian influenza disease detection and containment measures as indicated in the FAO/OIE Global Strategy for the Progressive Control of HPAI, such as stamping out (systematic culling of infected poultry), adoption of the requisite bio-security measures, animal/vehicular movement controls and vaccination with vaccines produced according to OIE guidelines if cases of HPAI are detected and when this is considered appropriate;
 7. **Declare** that countries should ensure that timely socio-economic and alternative livelihood studies are conducted leading to the establishment of relevant programs for affected areas;
 8. **Invite** countries to take into account the importance of re-stocking poultry in consultation with the poultry farmer associations, civil society, and other stakeholders;
 9. **Declare** that countries should put in place reporting incentives, such as compensation funds and schemes for affected farmers;
 10. **Declare** that 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 (note: in case of infections, biosecurity in poultry should be increased, and culling of wild birds is not recommended);
 11. **Declare** that CAREC-countries, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan 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 a human influenza pandemic;
13. **Affirm** the desire to strengthen the capacities and to increase the number of national and reference veterinary and human health laboratories in CAREC-countries, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan, so as to enhance their ability to carry out reliable H and N sub-typing of the influenza virus;
14. **Urge** all donors and agencies, including those of the United Nations system, to continue to provide substantial support to these countries as they formulate and implement integrated multi-sectoral plans for responding to avian influenza using procedures that ensure timely allocation of assistance;
15. **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;
16. **Call on** the international community and manufacturers of antivirals and diagnostics, protective equipment, vaccines (animal/ human), and other supplies to make these products accessible to CAREC-countries, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan;
17. **Recommend** that the leadership of CAREC-countries, of the Russian Federation and of Turkmenistan create a coordination committee comprised of representatives of the 10 countries participating in the "Regional Conference". The committee will be in close contact with a coordination mechanism established by the international donor community and international agencies in-country and region-wide. As a first priority, a mechanism for the regular exchange of information should be established, including an early-warning system. This is of specific importance for border regions. Furthermore, in the coordination committee discussions will take place concerning the development and implementation of 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, diagnostics, anti-viral drugs including antiviral medicines, vaccines, disinfectants, etc. The committee will report on progress made at the next conference, which is tentatively scheduled for June 2007. The country representatives participating in the "Regional Conference" propose that CAREC will facilitate communication between countries.
18. **Decide** to create three working groups of representatives of CAREC-countries, of the Russian Federation and of Turkmenistan covering the following three areas of work:
 - a. **Disease surveillance and early warning system**
 - b. **Laboratory capacity building**
 - c. **Public communication, governance, involvement of civil society and private sector**

The working groups will draft activity plans to strengthen collaborative region-wide disease control and prevention efforts, and will also report at the conference planned for June 2007.