

Concluding Remarks by Yuriko Shoji, UN Resident Coordinator, Kazakhstan
on the Central Asia Regional Roundtable on Avian Influenza Pandemic
Preparedness and Response : Almaty, Kazakhstan
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Thank you, Ambassador Van der Meer for giving me the floor. Distinguished Mr. Belonug, Dr. Jeugmans, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

We are almost at the end of our conference and it is an honour and privilege to be addressing you on behalf of colleagues from the UN agencies. We had the opportunity to address our growing concern on avian influenza and to discuss global strategies to improve country and regional preparedness and reduce the impact of a potential flu pandemic in this region.

Before I elaborate on my specific comments and our collective response, I would like to take a few minutes to pay a tribute to a honoured colleague, whose efforts and energy has been instrumental in our drive to fight the pandemic. I would like to take the opportunity to remember, and pay a tribute to Dr LEE Jong-wook, Director-General of the World Health Organization, who has suffered from a sudden hemorrhage in the brain and has passed away on 22 May. Dr. Lee is remembered for his passion and dedication in the fight against various global health threats, and avian influenza was no exception. We owe our joint work to colleagues such as Dr. Lee, who have not hesitated to give their best to improve the life of others.

In the last 2 days, we considered why it is relevant and important to discuss the problem of avian influenza in Central Asia and immediate neighbors. We all know that the migratory birds, and therefore the virus recognize no borders. As this region lies at the crossing point of four major flyways of migratory birds, we are at the junction of highly pathogenic AI virus as it potentially spreads from one region to another.

We recognize that AI is not just a medical concern, but it has wider social-economic implications, as it affects the economies and functioning of societies as a whole, as we have seen in the cases of South East Asia, both with the avian influenza, and with the SARS crisis. The livelihoods of small holders and food security will be jeopardized by the spread of avian influenza and large-scale cullings, which has already decimated poultry in an increasing number of countries. We learned of experts' fear that the virus may transform into a new influenza pandemic, which is liable to come at any time through a viral mutation.

Moreover, the avian influenza threat is not a one-off event but may return with the migratory patterns for the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is important that we begin to move beyond the initial emergency phase in our planning and begin to incorporate avian and human influenza issues into regular development planning activities, and it seems we have already moved ahead a great deal.

In order to deal with the global threat of avian influenza, the UN system has a coordinated response, and many of our sister agencies are represented in this meeting. Let us all remember that the UN system is working towards the achievement

of the Millennium Development Goals, and the spread of a possible pandemic, whether in animal or human form, and the way in which we will deal with the disease, will have a major impact on the achievement of the goals, especially the goals on poverty and communicable diseases.

Within the UN system, the overall coordination among the agencies is carried out by the UN System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIIC), Dr. David Nabarro whose name is today well known to all of us. At a country level the role of coordination is assigned to the UN Resident Coordinator's office in each of the countries concerned. The UN agencies work together as a team. As the UN specialized agencies have specific areas of expertise and mandate, the UN Country Teams benefit from a collective and cohesive UN response that builds on comparative advantage of each agency

I would also like to mention our partners which are the international financial institutions: the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, in particular. We have discussed the funding mechanisms available through the partners. The governments are urged to consider taking advantage of these facilities, which would enable not only individual but a joint response using UN agencies, which can offer technical expertise and coordination, but will be requiring additional funding. Yesterday we discussed how the international finance institutions will benefit from technical assessment capacities of agencies such as WHO and UNICEF, and of agencies on the ground for coordination.

However, most important of all, I would like to underline, that the countries themselves play the major role by involving a variety of groups in delivering these national strategies – government, civil society, private sector, academia and the media.

First of all the Governments are urged to be the leaders and champions from the highest level possible. In the long term Government efforts will be underpinned by allocations from the national budget, which will be complemented by technical and financial assistance from the international community.

The private sector will recognise their interest to be engaged – not the least because the continuity of business will be influenced both by avian influenza and a possible pandemic, for example in the travel and tourism, agriculture and livestock, financial and logistics services.

Civil society groups will have a key role – through mosque, temple or church; through the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement; through community organizations. The media are important partners to disseminate information.

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Finally, let me congratulate all of the participants on a productive discussion and an open and frank exchange of views. We have worked through the agenda which had set ambitious, but necessary outcome for all of us. As the result of this event, we will be able to produce a three-fold outcome, which include

- 1) an action plan for regional collaborative disease control and prevention activities;

- 2) framework for donor-coordination for the control of AI and influenza pandemic preparedness planning in the region and
- 3) agreement on priority actions and on key indicators to monitor the progress in the region, and to track the use of funds.

This Regional Conference has presented an opportunity to boost not only cooperation across national borders, but also agree on priority actions and key indicators to be used to monitor their progress in tackling the spread of avian influenza and preparing to prevent and/or respond to the potential flu pandemic in the region of Central Asia and its neighboring countries.

Thank you for your attention.