

**Special Event on “The Avian Flu”
ECOSOC Chamber
Thursday, 3 November 2005**

PRESIDENT’S SUMMARY

I. BACKGROUND

The Special Event of the Economic and Social Council on the Avian Flu, which was held on Thursday, 3 November 2005, was the second in a series launched by the Council in response to the new mandate given to the Council by the 2005 World Summit to “develop its ability to respond better and more rapidly to developments in the international economic, environmental and social fields” and to “support and complement international efforts aimed at addressing humanitarian emergencies.”

once a new mutant flu virus is able to infect humans. Indeed, one panelist noted that every country, every population is at risk for pandemic influenza whether or not it has sick birds. The likely damage to the trade and the international economy was considered to be high.

The lessons learnt from past experiences with new and re-emerging diseases indicate that if such diseases were not quickly identified and controlled, they were likely to have significant costs in health, financial, trade and even security terms. Secondly, special attention needed to be paid to the needs of developing countries. Many developing countries, especially the least developed countries, already bore a heavy burden of disease, malnutrition, poor veterinarian and health infrastructure and systems. These countries needed both technical and financial assistance in designing and implementing preparedness and response plans. The role of development cooperation thus remained critical in confronting global public health threats, especially when the international community was keen on ensuring the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Thirdly, transparency and speed in reporting cases was crucial to marshal an effective and timely response.

The Panelists identified a number of challenges, including most importantly, the need for all countries to develop national **pandemic influenza preparedness plans**. Such plans should include measures such as early warning systems, surveillance for the disease in animals and humans, the implementation of biosecurity measures, use of effective vaccines, close monitoring and culling when necessary and incentives for farmers to report by providing them with compensation for losses incurred by culling. Cross-departmental involvement at the national level under the leadership of a high-level focal point within Government in liaison with experienced **contingency planners** was also highly recommended.

The communication between UN system and governments and all stakeholders and the use of **risk communication** for creating global awareness including innovative communication techniques were also considered as vital.

Another essential element of the strategy to contain the virus was **access to affordable anti-viral medicines**. Presently, no pandemic vaccine was ready for commercial production and no country was likely to have adequate supplies until several months after a pandemic is declared. Resources should therefore be put into expanding production of anti-virals as well as seasonal flu vaccines to meet potential rather than current demand. **Research and development into effective vaccines** and investment in manufacturing capacity was, therefore, urgently needed as the lead time between the emergence of the virus and the production of the vaccine must be as short as possible to minimize the death toll. The issue of the appropriate use of intellectual property rights in ensuring adequate and affordable supplies of vaccines and medicines was also raised.

A number of participants pointed to the **role of partnerships** in effectively responding to avian flu. It was noted that private entities can help improve veterinary health surveillance, building capacity and improving impact. They can also engage community

organizations in stimulating changes in behavior and can also assist with the mobilization

III. ANNEX

A. Summary of Statements

H.E. Ambassador Munir Akram, President of the Economic and Social Council said that avian flu, like SARS and HIV/AIDS and other new and re-emerging diseases, demonstrated that no country was exempt from the spread of infectious diseases. He pointed out that one of the lessons of the past was that infectious diseases must be quickly and effectively contained to avoid grave health and economic consequences. He noted that the poor would be hardest hit in terms of illness as well as bearing the brunt of economic loss from preventive measures taken to control the disease. In this context, the President said that the role for development cooperation would be critical and proposed the establishment of a global fund that would be dedicated to helping countries put in place preparedness and response plans and for compensating farmers and producers for losses due to culling poultry. The President also welcomed the collaborative efforts of FAO and WHO in bringing the attention of the global community of the urgency of the Avian flu threat and urged other UN system agencies, funds and programmes, within their respective mandates, to consider how to address health issues in their activities. He noted that the case for addressing health as a major cross-cutting issue in the Council's long-term agenda had become relevant in the context of the "globalization" of new and re-emerging diseases. President also called for more support for investment and research in vaccines and other actions that would ensure that the entire world shares in the burden and costs – but also fruits of prevention and care.

H.E. Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the General Assembly

Dr. David Heymann, Representative of the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that as soon as the avian flu virus is able to infect humans, a pandemic would be inevitable. To limit its spread and damage, Dr. Heymann proposed a better surveillance system of infected animal

knowledge and effectively manage information to support decision making in a potential humanitarian crisis.

B. The Interactive Debate

A number of countries (Canada, China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union, the United States of America, and Vietnam) participating in the interactive debate outlined their national plans and initiatives taken to prevent the spread of avian flu and its transformation into a pandemic. They stressed the importance of international cooperation to prevent a global influenza-pandemic outbreak and, in this connection, underscored the role of the United Nations system in leading efforts to help countries build capacity for pandemic planning and in effectively coordinating regional and other efforts.

For further details, including statements of panelists and delegations, please visit:
http://www.un.org/docs/ecosoc/meetings/2005/Avian_Flu.html