



VIENNA SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING ON AVIAN AND HUMAN PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

PROVISIONAL VERSION
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CHAIR'S SUMMARY

BY THE AUSTRIAN EU PRESIDENCY¹

Representatives of more than 110 countries and international organisations met in Vienna (Austria) on 6 and 7 June 2006 for the '*Vienna Senior Officials Meeting on Avian and Human Pandemic Influenza*'. Representatives of civil society attended the meeting.

The **main aims** of the meeting were

- to bring all relevant international governmental and inter-governmental actors together, following-up in particular the Washington, Geneva and Beijing conferences - for:
- a stocktaking on the current situation of avian influenza and human pandemic preparedness planning world-wide: by countries, continents and regions as well as by global and regional intergovernmental organisations;
- an overview on disbursement of pledges made at the Beijing international donors conference, and a discussion on up-to-date specific funding requirements and strategies;
- open and future-oriented exchanges of views and experience on today's major challenges,
- a discussion on international strategies to fight avian influenza and to prepare for a possible human influenza pandemic; and

¹ delivered by Dr. Thomas M. BUCHSBAUM, EU Presidency Co-ordinator on Avian Influenza and Human Pandemic Preparedness

- on the strengthening and further structuring of the international partnership in this field including the planning on future meetings.

This global conference was co-**organised** by the Austrian Presidency of the European Union and the European Commission, on behalf of the European Union, in close co-operation with the United States of America – in their capacity of host of the Washington IPAPI Senior Officials Meeting of last October – and the People's Republic of China – in her capacity of host of the Beijing international donors conference of this January –, as well as with the relevant international organisations, in particular the United Nations – through its UN System Co-ordinator for Avian and Human Influenza -, the Food and Agriculture Organisation FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health OIE, the World Health Organisation WHO and the World Bank – as together commonly called the "four sisters" of bird flu and human pandemic.

Since the last global conference on the issue, the Beijing international donors conference of 17 and 18 January 2006, the **situation** has markedly changed: The number of affected countries and regions has rapidly increased to a quarter of the world's countries in three continents; avian influenza in Africa, the Middle East and Europe became a reality; and the number of human cases of 2006 already equals the number of all cases of last year.

The conference was **addressed by high representatives** of the Austrian EU Presidency, the European Commission, the USA, China, the Africa Union and the United Nations.

They reaffirmed the common principles of country-based plans, action and reporting, as well as of flexible financing frameworks. They believe that avian influenza may be evolving more rapidly than the international response. They pointed out to the changed situation since the Beijing conference in respect to avian influenza, in particular with regard to Africa; and to successes on country and organisation levels. They also expressed concern on weak government and local responses which may carry grave consequences on avian and human health - and much beyond -, also in neighbouring countries and regions.

They appealed to *now* go from talking and planning to action and implementation, for enhancing real political leadership and country-based ownership, for implementing pledges and increasing funds to countries and international organisations in need, for early notification of outbreaks and sharing of samples, for improving surveillance, protection and containment measures - in particular with respect to the H5N1 animal virus - and national preparedness plans, and to further develop incentives and compensation schemes.

They expressed solidarity with Africa and other developing countries in need, and pointed to the economic, social and security aspects of avian influenza and a possible pandemic. They requested technical agencies and the World Bank to undertake ever closer co-operation, co-ordination and joint action, in particular in regard to affected countries, and to continue detailed regular reporting and sharing of joint assessments.

At the conference, the United Nation System Senior Co-ordinator for Avian and Human Influenza (UNSIC) and the World Bank presented their **first biannual joint report on *'Responses to Avian and Human Influenza Threats: Progress, Analysis and Recommendations'***. It identifies a number of priorities for international action, including consistent information, education and communication campaigns; fair and well-functioning incentive structures and compensation mechanisms in order to assure, *inter alia*, early reporting of sick animals; support to best animal health practices, emphasis to bio-security and strategic vaccination, investment in veterinary laboratory diagnostic capacity and poultry vaccine development; establishment of rapid response mechanisms and optimal practice for human pandemic containment, substantial investments in human laboratory diagnostic capacity, efforts to share information, viral samples and sequences, to ensure affordable access to safe and effective vaccines and antivirals; systematic international action for effective use of epidemiology, virology and social science, including the development of develop vaccines and diagnostics; and the reinforcement of the flexible financing framework.

There was a strong need for the international community to offer predictable external assistance, while improving systems for fund distribution. External partners could further help in kind with rapid deployment of veterinary and human epidemiologists, as well as training veterinarians and health workers in surveillance, risk mitigation and response. Recipient countries bore the responsibility for preparing draft plans – even if rudimentary – in order for donors to make informed decisions on funding priorities.

Technical agencies - FAO, OIE, WHO - as well as regional rapporteurs informed on the **current situation** in respect to avian influenza - including its impact on human health and economy - and to human pandemic preparedness in different regions of the world: prevention, containment and preparedness strategies and respective plans at different levels.

The World Bank and the technical agencies provided an update on the **mobilisation of pledges** made in Beijing in support to country, regional and global programmes. The World Bank presented its first biannual update report on the *Multidonor Financing Framework* on avian and human influenza'. For the period of calendar year 2005 through April 30, 2006, donors had reported commitments of US\$1,089 million - 83 percent is in cash, 17 percent is in kind -, of which US\$286 million has been disbursed - 80 percent is in cash, 20 percent is in kind. Commitments represent 58 percent of the total pledged, while 15 percent of the pledged amount has been reported as disbursed. Since May 1, further commitments and disbursements were made by individual countries.

While country-level activities had been identified as the key priority early on, balance would be critical to ensure a global response that met the evolving challenge. Donors were asked to continue to consult with the key technical agencies and with the multilateral financing institutions. In a number of areas more donor focus was needed, and additional pledges might also be sought. The World Bank's avian and human influenza (AHI) Facility was a trust fund facility to assist countries in meeting financing gaps in their AHI integrated country programs to minimize the risk and socioeconomic impact of avian and possible human pandemic influenza. The AHI Facility would be available to co-finance operations supported by the World Bank or its concessional financing affiliate, the International Development Association (IDA).

The technical international organisations reported on funding received out of the Beijing pledges, on revised requirements in the light of the developments of the last months, and on resulting funding gaps. UN was underfinanced and therefore in trouble - with respect to demands and expectations from individual countries and the international community. UN needed 220 mio. USD for the remainder of the current year. FAO doubled its requirements in relation to its Beijing request, with a 230 mio. USD gap for three years. OIE requirements were revised to 27 mio. € WHO has a gap of 73 mio. USD for two years.

During the thematic sessions, on avian influenza, the conference heard good news, e.g. the unchanged character of the H5N1 virus not generally affecting human beings, effective measures within the European Union, and positive developments in some Asian countries. Not so good news were the unprecedented behaviours of the H5N1 strains, the expansion of the affected area in Africa, grave consequences of avian influenza outbreaks in farmers' and whole communities' income through drastic drops in poultry prices and consumption, weak government service in a number of countries, and concern that avian influenza could become endemic with poultry farms if not effectively responded to.

Appeals were made for not focusing on the H5N1 virus only when preparing for the next pandemic, for not separating avian from human health measures, for developing enhanced surveillance, transparency and eradication measures, as well as laboratory facilities and training measures. Challenges were persisting, and national response was not always at the level of such challenges.

Other issues repeatedly addressed were limited scientific evidence in various fields - including on wild birds -, vaccinations for animals and humans, stockpiling of antivirals, necessary changes in animal husbandry, necessary repeated simulation exercises, the essential character of communication, and necessary improvements and co-ordination of national pandemic preparedness plans, in particular in respect to inter-sectoral and trans-national approaches.

A number of delegations referred to regional and sub-regional co-operation in fighting avian influenza and a possible human influenza pandemic - including regular meetings at various levels as well as simulation exercises -, and to co-operation with the private sector.

Special thematic sessions were held on communication as well as on antivirals, vaccines and research. On **education, information and communication**, the principles of timely, accurate and consistent information based upon scientific evidence were reaffirmed. Public communication mattered and was a cornerstone in all government efforts - to accompany other strategies. Total honesty was crucial - in order to gain and maintain trust in public communication. Information to the public and different target groups at all levels was essential. General hygiene measures were important to be stressed in all communication, as they were very effective - whether antivirals and vaccines were available or not when needed.

Volunteers and professionals of civil society - and their associations - would be crucial once a pandemic occurred.

A number of good practices were presented like e.g. regular inter-ministerial communication meetings, co-operation with national and local media and other communicators including from medical, humanitarian and business communities, one-stop-shop websites, media seminars and background briefings, media leaders conferences, early designation of specialised spokespersons, networks of health ministers spokespersons, and crisis communication simulation exercises.

During the session on **antivirals, vaccines and research**, the current and expected shortfalls and challenges in respect to antivirals and human vaccines were highlighted. On antivirals, present and attempted stockpiles were addressed, including regional and global stockpiling, as well as possible alternative types of antivirals. Only by increasing production facilities and introducing new technologies, a relevant production of pandemic vaccines could be prepared for. A number of proposals existed to these ends. Emerging pre-pandemic vaccines had still to undergo testing and licensing procedures. Increasing the rate of seasonal vaccination might contribute to pandemic preparedness.

Issues and challenges of animal vaccination were presented - where national policies differ and a number of caveats and conditions were voiced. Animal vaccination might be one possible short-term measure if properly managed and monitored. - Evidence-based research including sharing results, had to be enhanced *now* in many fields, and well prepared for the pandemic phase.

In order to provide for a structured **follow-up to this and previous conferences** it was agreed to hold the next such political meetings with similar participation in about six months time in Africa, upon invitation of the African Union, and in another six months time in India, upon invitation of the Government of India - at senior official or ministerial level. In addition to stocktaking and policy-making on avian influenza and human influenza pandemic preparedness - including upon biannual update reports by, in particular, UNSIC and the World Bank -, additional elements - like e.g. pledging - could be added to the agenda of future meeting.

*At the end, allow me to share with you a few **personal impressions** on this conference in a nutshell:*

- *We, the relevant international governmental and inter-governmental actors met for a global partnership meeting and agreed on working together on enhanced co-operation, co-ordination and joint action.*
- *We unanimously acknowledge that avian influenza and a possible human influenza pandemic do not respect borders, constitute a global threat and thus require global response and action, and agree that the world has to act as one.*
- *A possible pandemic is a threat, an opportunity and an obligation: a global threat to the health and life of millions of animals and humans, an opportunity to contain, mitigate and prepare for such and similar threats, and an obligation to act in our own countries and together, as well as to make necessary funds available.*
- *At this conference, we went from simple talking to harmony, and we know and agree that we should progress via synergy to unity on and in action.*
- *Given the rapidly evolving situation, we understand that the pledges need to be disbursed early, that more funds are and will be necessary, that priorities may have to be reviewed in the light of the evolving situation, and that ways are to be looked for and found, together, to induce early disbursement.*
- *The alternative to quick disbursement is the further spreading of avian influenza and its devastating effects on farmers and their families, on entire communities and states, as well as the increase of the threat that the H5N1 virus changes to easily infect humans.*
- *We heard with pleasure that technical agencies and the World Bank have been progressing towards closer co-operation and joint action which is a prerequisite set by donors and recipients alike.*
- *And we applaud increased regional and sub-regional approaches, co-operation and joint action by countries, regional and global organisations.*
- *No country, no region, no organisation was blamed. All of us have homework to take with us from Vienna and to do - the quicker the better for all of us. And we are all aware of this.*

- *We did not shy away from discussing difficult and complex issues like e.g. incentives and compensation, vectors and reasons for spreading the H5N1 virus, vaccinations of poultry, availability of antivirals and vaccines for humans, and communication to politicians.*
- *We agreed to have a co-ordinated follow-up to this meeting: there will be similar meetings in about six months time each, starting this December in Africa, upon invitation of the African Union, followed by another one in about twelve months from now, in India, upon invitation of the Government of India.*
- *At each such meeting, we are looking forward to receiving updated, detailed UNSIC-World Bank reports.*