



منظمة الأغذية  
والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

联合国  
粮食及  
农业组织

Food  
and  
Agriculture  
Organization  
of  
the  
United  
Nations

Organisation  
des  
Nations  
Unies  
pour  
l'alimentation  
et  
l'agriculture

Organización  
de las  
Naciones  
Unidas  
para la  
Agricultura  
y la  
Alimentación

## OPENING REMARKS

by

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At the

*Workshop on Avian Influenza and wildlife: regional surveillance and  
research priorities for Asia  
3 to 5 September 2007, Bangkok, Thailand*

Distinguished representatives from USDA, WCS, USAID, Mahidol University  
Country delegates from various departments and organizations,  
Invited guests,  
Colleagues from FAO,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to deliver some opening remarks at the onset of the workshop entitled *Avian Influenza and wildlife: regional surveillance and research priorities for Asia*.

All of us here recollect that the H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) crisis started in Asia in early 2004. Since then HPAI has killed large numbers of poultry and ducks in the region and to date as many as 150 million poultry have also been destroyed as part of disease control measures. In addition 320 human cases of H5N1 influenza have been confirmed by WHO in 12 countries, out of which 193 have proved fatal. Globally, the disease has spread to the Near East, some countries in Africa and to Europe. Now, according to the OIE, a total of 64 countries have reported HPAI outbreaks. Many countries in Europe have identified H5N1 in wild birds although the disease has not been identified in poultry.

The FAO-OIE Global Strategy for the Progressive Control of HPAI recognises many potential routes for the spread of H5N1 HPAI, particularly inadequate control over the movement of poultry and poultry products, unregulated market trade, and trade in wild birds. Considering, however, prevailing levels of poor biosecurity at poultry farms in Asia, contact birds – resident as well as migratory - may play a role in the spread of HPAI. To help elucidate the role of wild birds in the disease spread, FAO has created a wildlife disease element to the EMPRES programme – that is the Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases.

In respect of wildlife and HPAI, FAO leads and facilitates partnerships in the area of animal disease, and plays an important role to coordinate activities, enhance training

opportunities, and support scientific studies that aim at better understanding about many aspects of H5N1 viral ecology. Combining research and operational work, FAO is strongly promoting capacity building in the field as well as the practical application of science and new technologies – such as satellite remote sensing, GIS and satellite positioning systems – in the surveillance and control of other transboundary diseases that involve both wildlife and agricultural elements.

Current studies of HPAI promoted and/or coordinated by FAO include:

- identifying wild bird H5N1 virus reservoirs, shedders, and transporters;
- epidemiological studies that evaluate linkages between agriculture and wildlife as possible modes of disease transmission;
- wildlife ecology studies that look at key wildlife species, their migratory patterns, habitat use, and the timing of migration as it relates to HPAI H5N1 outbreaks in poultry and wildlife;
- risk analyses including GIS mapping of historical and expected outbreaks using available FAO-OIE data; and
- remote sensing as a tool to better understand how environmental conditions may be playing a role in the emergence of this disease.

Current studies by a wide range of stakeholders at various levels are intensive and promising; however, it is evident that the exact cause and occurrence of the wild bird component of the disease still needs further in-depth scientific investigation and continued and enhanced investment.

In this connection, I sincerely hope that all participants at this workshop, through exchange of knowledge and information, will gain much insight into the scale and scope of surveillance and research, at both the country and regional level that is needed to investigate and combat H5N1. Our challenge is obvious: globally we need to have a clearer scientific understanding of the ecology of H5N1 in wild birds and whether this virus can be maintained in wild bird populations; how this might impact on poultry production in the long term and how this infection might affect wild bird populations, and vice versa

I am pleased to note that distinguished experts from noted institutions will share their intellectual knowledge and practical experience through technical presentations and discussions during the next three days. I am thus expecting that this workshop will bring together a set of visionary and practical recommendations that will be followed up by actions for and by the various partner organizations represented here. I also anticipate that the collaborative network on regional surveillance and research in wild birds will be further strengthened and expanded from this workshop.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners, namely the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Mahidol University and its Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation. This workshop would not have materialized without their generous support and cooperation. In a similar vein, I would also like to express my appreciation to various ministries and organizations which have send off representatives and experts to enrich this workshop and share of information and experiences. I wish you all great success.

Thank you.