

INTERNATIONAL PLEDGING CONFERENCE ON AVIAN  
AND HUMAN PANDEMIC INFLUENZA  
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Statement by  
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Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no longer any doubt that Avian Influenza poses a major threat to the international community and that its spread is an **international** problem requiring an **international** response.

This conference must send a strong signal to **worried citizens everywhere** that the **international community** is indeed responding, that it is taking the battle against bird flu **seriously**, and that **major donors** are ready to support affected countries in their campaigns against the disease.

The recent outbreaks in Turkey underline the fact that the virus continues to cross borders. FAO is concerned that the avian influenza virus could become entrenched in the Black Sea, Caucasus and Near East regions through trade and movement of people and animals, and could be **further spread** by migratory birds coming from Africa in the spring.

Countries in **Africa** deserve special attention. In Turkey, the virus has already reached the crossroads of Asia, Europe and Africa, and there is a real risk of it spreading further South and West. If it were to become rooted in the

African countryside, the consequences for a continent already devastated by hunger and poverty could be truly catastrophic.

Today I should like to reiterate a message that you have already heard, but it is one of vital importance that bears repeating: **fighting the avian influenza virus in animals is the most effective, and the most cost-effective way to reduce the likelihood of H5N1 mutating or reassorting to cause a human flu pandemic.** The evidence is that focusing our efforts on containing bird flu in domestic animals – mostly chickens and ducks – will significantly reduce the risk to humans.

The tools for winning the battle against bird flu exist: several countries in Asia have been waging successful containment campaigns.

So we argue that while it is, of course, important for governments to take precautions to protect their citizens, such as stockpiling anti-flu drugs, the world needs to focus on the animal health problem at the same time: **fight the disease where it is today, to prevent something much worse just down the road.**

This approach requires governments and local authorities to take actions which consider that bird flu is **both a human health and an animal health issue.** This makes the development of national bird flu action plans and campaigns more **complex**, because it requires **close cooperation between health, agricultural and veterinary authorities.** Countries that follow such a **cross-sectoral** approach and foster close collaboration between the human

health and agricultural sectors are likely to be the most successful in battling the disease.

FAO and OIE, in collaboration with WHO, have elaborated a Global Strategy to fight Avian Influenza. The main elements of the strategy are these:

We need to build much greater **awareness about the disease in rural communities**. Farmers have to be the first line of defence in detecting and reporting the disease in infected poultry. This means that effective **communication campaigns** targeting rural populations are needed to inform farmers and their families about the risks of the disease, and about basic hygiene and biosecurity measures they can take.

It also means that compensation schemes for farmers to encourage early reporting are needed.

Improved **surveillance and detection** is needed so that farmers and veterinary services can intervene quickly and apply the internationally recommended set of actions, such as **culling, biosecurity measures and vaccination**.

FAO, in close collaboration with partners such as OIE and national agricultural and veterinary authorities, supports, and will continue to support, countries in their bird flu campaigns in a manner that responds to the specific needs of each country.

One of the key elements for a successful campaign against bird flu is **centrally organised veterinary services**. Governments will fail in combating avian influenza if they don't give their veterinary services the political support as well as the **technical and financial means** to fight the virus. Early warning systems, swift interventions and preventive measures will remain **weak** and **inadequate** without **strong centrally organized veterinary services**.

As already mentioned, wild birds have a role in introducing the disease. In particular, they are crucial in carrying the virus over large distances. However, many questions about the role of wild birds remain open and need further investigation. In any case, their role is far from being the only key issue. **Trade** and the **movement of people and animals** are largely responsible for the spread of the virus, once it is introduced. For this reason, the movements of animals, products and people from endemic areas to other regions should be strictly monitored.

Given the international dimension of the disease, close **cooperation between countries and regions is essential, and detection and control campaigns must be harmonized**. With our partners, over the past two years FAO has organized regional networks of national laboratories and epidemiological teams to improve the quality and transparency of the detection and reporting of outbreaks. At global level, FAO and OIE have developed information and epidemiological analysis systems and promoted research. We are committed to continuing and strengthening these activities.

FAO has helped affected countries to design bird flu **control programmes**, supporting **surveillance** and laboratory **diagnostics**. Socio-economic studies on the impact of the disease and the cost of control programmes, as well as on options for restructuring, have been carried out.

In the longer term, **farming practices** that carry risk , such as mixing poultry species in farms or in live markets, will need to be re-assessed. Changing farming practices, though, must be done with caution in order to mitigate the impact on millions of farmers who depend on poultry to feed their families and earn their livelihoods.

All of this costs money. But the longer we delay, the greater the cost and the greater the risk of a pandemic.

The global campaign in animals alone is estimated to cost several hundred million dollars. FAO is one of the key partners in the campaign.

To date, FAO has received about \$28 million from donors, and since the onset of the crisis in 2003, we have spent more than \$7 million from our own resources.

Over the next three years, FAO will need at least \$50 million more to continue our support for essential regional and global cooperation and some \$80 million to assist countries in implementing their national bird flu control programmes. Hopefully, this pledging conference will help us to realize these targets.

Before closing, I wish to emphasize that FAO's collaboration with the OIE, WHO, the UN system coordinator and the World Bank has been genuine and effective. We are whole-heartedly committed to continuing and extending this cooperation.

To conclude I reiterate that FAO's message today is straightforward: **fighting the avian influenza virus in animals, among chickens and ducks, is the most effective, and, the most cost-effective way to reduce the likelihood of H5N1 mutating or reassorting to cause a human flu pandemic.**

What we need is the financial muscle to do the job. I hope that you have come here to flex your muscles.

Thank you.