



**UN System Influenza Coordination (UNSIC)
PROGRESS REPORT
1st October - 31st December 2007**

INTRODUCTION

During October to December, recurring outbreaks of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1 virus in poultry have been reported in Germany, Myanmar, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, and for the first time in Benin. Outbreaks of Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza viruses have been reported in the Dominican Republic (H5N2) and the Republic of Korea (H7N8). The virus is considered to be entrenched in poultry populations in Indonesia, Egypt, Nigeria, and possibly parts of China and Bangladesh.

Cases of human H5N1 infections were confirmed in Indonesia (9 cases of infection, of which 8 were fatal), in Egypt (5 cases, 4 fatal), in China (2 cases, 1 fatal), in Vietnam (1 fatal case of infection), and for the first time in Myanmar (1 case of infection) and Pakistan (1 fatal case of infection). As there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus, the World Health Organization (WHO) pandemic alert remains at phase 3.

WHO Member States continued their negotiations on Pandemic Influenza Preparedness: the sharing of influenza viruses and access to vaccines and other benefits was discussed in an Intergovernmental Working Group meeting in Geneva on 20 – 24 November.

The main focus of UNSIC's work during this period was to support preparations for the International Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza in New Delhi on 4 – 6 December (the first intergovernmental conference of 2007, and sequel to the Bamako conference in December 2006).

1. UNSIC's involvement in coordination of Interagency Action

The *Technical Working Group (TWG) on Influenza*¹ met on 26 October 2007 and reviewed the Revised Concept of Operations for the UN System in an Influenza Pandemic (CONOPS) and recommended its endorsement by the Steering Committee. TWG members also discussed the preparations for the International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza, and talked about agencies' contributions to the Third UN-WB Progress Report and the Review of the UN Consolidated Action Plan. The *Deputy Secretary-General's Steering Committee on Influenza*² met on 16 November 2007 and endorsed the revised CONOPS and recommended its testing in a simulation exercise, and agreed on priorities of the UN System Influenza Coordinator in 2008 as outlined in a background document prepared by UNSIC.

¹ The Note for the Record of this TWG meeting is available under <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=577>

² The Note for the Record and background documents of this Steering Committee meeting are available under <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=582>

On 29 November, in advance of the New Delhi International Ministerial Conference, the TWG convened a Special Meeting³ to focus on issues, positions and strategies for the different sessions of the Conference. Mr. Vineet Chawdhry, Joint Secretary of the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, briefed TWG members on the “Road Map for 2008” envisaged to be developed in the course of the conference and on other relevant information.

The *Review of the UN System Consolidated Action Plan for Avian and Human Influenza 2007* that was published in September 2007 was amended by including an update on the participating agencies’ financial requirements for 2008. (Final version of 15 November 2007: <http://www.undg.org/docs/7414/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20UNCAPAH%20REVIEW%202007%20FINAL2.pdf>)

The *Management Committee for the UN Central Fund for Influenza Action (CFIA)* held its fifth meeting on 10 December 2007. CFIA members were updated on the funding status of the CFIA, and decided to introduce a mechanism for performance based allocation to the fund. Following a new commitment by Norway of USD 1.85 million, CFIA members were asked to submit project proposals by mid January 2008.

A new source of information is the recently launched website of the UNDP’s Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) Office (<http://www.undp.org/mdtf>): It includes a website for the CFIA, as well as 15 other global and country level MDTFs and/or Joint Programmes. In addition to information on the CFIA’s governance, decision making and donor contributions, it will also include information on approved projects/ programmes as well as periodic reports on the progress of implementation.

Support to Coordination at Country and Regional Level

The UN System Influenza Coordinator traveled to Asia in early November. On 6 November he contributed to the “Poultry in the 21st Century” conference in Thailand, focusing particularly on the challenge of biosecurity and improving poultry health. The next day the UNSIC Asia and Pacific Regional Hub (APRH) convened a Regional UN system Meeting as well as a Regional UN-Partner Meeting on AHI. The Coordinator reviewed progress with interagency coordination on influenza in the South-East Asia Region through meetings with various representatives of UN agencies and partners, regional bodies and donors. He noted that coordination is functioning well and providing a valuable environment for addressing tensions and encouraging synergy. He recognized the effort being made by international organizations to engage with regional entities (ASEAN, APEC etc). He also met with the Government of Thailand on topical issues in intergovernmental policies on influenza. On 8 - 9 November, the UN System Influenza Coordinator was in Tokyo, Japan, for consultations with members of the Japanese government on both the control of HPAI and interdepartmental efforts for pandemic preparedness. They discussed the forthcoming Intergovernmental Working Group on virus and benefit sharing and the 2008 G8 summit. He continued on 10 November to Beijing, China, for the ASEM Workshop on Avian Influenza Control and meetings with government officials and UN agency representatives. He was given a very detailed analysis of the H5N1 situation in China and the extraordinary progress made as a result of the engagement of central government, local authorities and communities. On 14 – 15 November he visited New Delhi, India, to meet with UN representatives as well as government officials organizing the International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza to discuss the agenda and aspects of the programme. Members of the APRH joined the Coordinator on his country visits.

³ The Summary of the Special TWG meeting is available under <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=581>

The Head of the APRH visited Laos on 1-2 October to observe the UN Country Team tabletop simulation exercise, to meet with the members of the UNCT Lao PDR and participate in a meeting between the Avian Influenza Coordinators of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. From 9-14 December, she joined the World Bank on an appraisal mission to Mongolia. Members of APRH engaged in various regional and sub-regional inter-governmental initiatives, and participated in meetings such as the MBDS Country Cordoning Committee on 8-9 October in Bangkok, the ASEAN Multi-Sectoral Pandemic Preparedness Workshop on 29-30 November in Bangkok, and the APEC EINet Steering Committee for Virtual Symposium on 10 December in Singapore. UNSIC APRH also provided strengthened interim support to the IFRC hosted monthly Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Meeting, in the form of chairmanship and substantive support. During the months from October to December, Dr. Richard Coker from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine was engaged as an advisor to UNSIC, based at the APRH Bangkok: he contributed to the preparations for the New Delhi conference and to the work underway in the South Asia region.

2. Intergovernmental Processes

The fifth International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza took place in New Delhi, India, from 4 – 6 December 2007. Organized and hosted by the Government of India, the Conference brought together 500 participants, representing 111 countries and 26 international agencies under the vision “One World, One Health”. While participants reiterated the need to sustain intensive efforts to control HPAI in countries where the virus is entrenched and to remain vigilant now, significant emphasis was put on the expansion from an emergency response approach to medium-term strategies for improved animal and human health, as well as to the broadening of pandemic preparedness planning into a truly multi-sectoral effort. Whilst the conference was not specifically designed for donor contributions, a session was allocated for those wishing to announce financial assistance. Pledges totaling US\$ 401 million were made (in addition to the \$2.3 billion pledged in previous Ministerial Conferences of Beijing and Bamako). Conclusions and recommendations of the conference sessions were used by the Indian Government to develop a ‘Vision and Road Map for 2008’ designed to assist governments in their planning and offering benchmarks for monitoring progress. The Road Map was handed to the World Bank and the UN System Influenza Coordinator to encourage countries to make good use of it, adapting it to their needs. (<http://www.delmincon.com/avianroadmap.pdf>)

Delegates requested a review of the framework for financing actions related to Avian and Human Influenza (AHI) as endorsed in Beijing in 2006 and consider how it could be made more effective in the light of emerging experience and likely future developments. Given the focus on medium and long term approaches for improving animal health services, increasing bio-security in livestock production and marketing, and reducing disease threats at the animal and human interface, delegates from some countries requested the specialized International Organizations, the World Bank and UNSIC to articulate a strategy for taking this work forward on a global scale, and outline options for implementing the strategy in a way which builds on progress made through efforts to control Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza and prepare for a human pandemic. The UN system and World Bank were asked to ensure that this work be completed before the next high-level International Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza which is due to be hosted by the Government of Egypt in October 2008.

3. Global Readiness to mitigate the societal impact of the next Influenza Pandemic

Pandemic Contingency Planning

In November, PIC/UNSIC attended the WHO Working Group established to revise the WHO pandemic preparedness guidelines. The Director of PIC was invited to chair an international taskforce which will prepare new WHO guidelines on how governments should prepare sectors beyond the health sector to continue delivering essential services during a pandemic.

PIC Regional Planning Officers (RPOs) and a Contingency Planning Consultant based at the APRH in Bangkok inter alia visited China, Fiji, Guatemala, Kenya, Laos, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Panama, Papua New-Guinea, Serbia, Thailand, Tunisia and Vietnam to organize workshops on pandemic preparedness, facilitate tabletop simulations, strengthen contingency planning, or assess support needs.

PIC/UNSIC also conducted country visits in South East and Central Asia and Eastern Europe to explore the scope for developing projects to help governments to develop a multi-sectoral approach to pandemic preparedness and to strengthen disaster management systems. It is intended that the first such project be piloted in Serbia.

In *West Africa*, the PIC Regional Officer undertook missions to Cap Verde, Senegal and Guinea Bissau, and participated in planning for an ECOWAS Regional Simulation in collaboration with the Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Institute.

The PIC *Latin America* regional office visited Honduras in October and El Salvador in November to support the revision of their Avian and Human Influenza contingency plan and to participate in a meeting of the “CONAPREVIAR” (Comision Nacional de Prevencion Contra una Pandemia de Influenza Aviar/ National commission for prevention against a pandemic of avian Influenza).

The PIC RPO in the *Middle East* facilitated a simulation of the UN Country Teams (UNCTs) for Jordan and Iraq contingency plans for a human influenza pandemic in Amman in November. The exercise gathered 20 participants from both UNCTs and the Jordanian Ministry of Health. The meeting highlighted the need for more awareness over the multi-sectoral impact of a pandemic and the need for more interaction between partners in order to align their preparedness processes. In Egypt, the RPO organized a workshop for the UNCT for Egypt to review of its contingency plans for avian and pandemic influenza. During the meeting, approximately 20 representatives from UN agencies and the government of Egypt discussed pandemic scenarios and identified strengths and weaknesses in existing plans.

Humanitarian pandemic preparedness

PIC/UNSIC co-convened with IFRC a high-level meeting of NGOs, Red Cross and UN humanitarian agencies on 29 October in Geneva, at the IFRC’s Headquarters. A total of 21 NGOs, UN agencies and other International Organisations like the IFRC and ICRC signed a declaration committing to work together to get ready to respond to the humanitarian consequences on vulnerable populations of an influenza pandemic. An inter-agency technical group co-chaired by IFRC and PIC/UNSIC was established to ensure progress on the commitments made at the meeting.

On 10-13 December a joint IFRC/PIC-UNSIC/USAID team visited Egypt to commence a process whereby the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, key NGOs and UN humanitarian agencies will work with the Government of Egypt to prepare a joint humanitarian plan setting out in detail respective roles and responsibilities for meeting humanitarian needs during a pandemic.

Development of Pandemic Simulations

In October PIC/UNSIC ran a training of trainers workshop on simulations in Geneva to boost the capacity of UN regional staff and national government officials to carry out pandemic simulation exercises. UNSIC APRH provided interim support to the UNCT contingency planning process with specific focus on supporting testing of their contingency plans. With UNSIC New York, APRH led the development of a new functional UNCT simulation package, and organized piloting of the new simulation together with the UNCT Thailand on 3-4 December, inviting observers from 10 UNCTs in the region.

4. Tracking and reporting on progress

UNISC, together with the World Bank, published the *Third UN-World Bank Global Progress Report on Responses to Avian Influenza and State of Pandemic Readiness*. A synopsis of the report is available in all six UN languages (<http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=52>). The report was made available to participants of the New Delhi International Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza and served as a crucial background document. Based on data gathered from national governments in 146 countries, country specific case studies and financial information collected from donor countries, the report assesses progress achieved so far and identifies gaps in the response to Avian Influenza and pandemic preparedness. The results presented in the report indicate that substantial progress has been made in the initial phase of the global response to HPAI and threats to public health. The data from countries suggests that the capacity to respond to HPAI infection in poultry has improved, as well as the human influenza virus diagnostic and surveillance capacity. However, capacities vary significantly and are still considered insufficient in a number of countries. And while there has been an increase in the number of countries reporting that they are planning for pandemic influenza, the preparations need to pay more attention to multi-sectoral planning, operational readiness on the local level and cooperation between neighbouring countries.

5. Coordination of Communication

The UN Communications Group's Task Force on Avian and Human Influenza met on 13 December 2007. To be able to rapidly exchange agency-approved messages and talking points between agency focal points during the course of an influenza pandemic or other global emergencies, the Task Force agreed to utilize the Emergency Notification Service (ENS) alert system. For posting documents and exchanging supplementary information during such an event, agencies agreed to set up a SharePoint website.

Colleagues in the UN Department of Public Information worked with UNSIC and UNICEF to revise UNSIC's communication strategy: to describe the positive results with control of HPAI which feature in the progress report without implying that (a) the risk of HPAI has completely declined (as it could flare up at any time) or the risk of a pandemic has receded. UNSIC's communications needed to convey that resources received to date have been well used and that new resources are required, especially to help fill some critical gaps in the response. Pursuing this line proved to be challenging because of the decline in media interest: the main event was a press conference on 29 November. Overall, press coverage of Avian and Pandemic influenza issues in the run up to the December 2007 Delhi Conference was generally reasonable and balanced, though less than before the Bamako Conference in December 2006.

6. Conclusions

The last quarter of 2007 was a busy and productive period for all international organizations engaged in avian and pandemic influenza issues. Through continued UNSIC/PIC efforts, including several missions, both support and guidance continued to be provided to UN Country Teams and representatives of Governments. UN inter-agency, IFRC and NGO collaboration on pandemic preparedness was strengthened through high-level commitments made on October 29th: good follow-up will be needed. The UN Concept of Operations and Consolidated Action Plan were updated and represent a valuable tool on interagency approaches to pandemic preparedness. PIC provided support to WHO for revising their pandemic preparedness guidelines (an ongoing effort). The third UN-World Bank Progress Report on Responses to Avian Influenza and State of Pandemic Readiness was finalized, published and distributed at the fifth International Ministerial Conference on API in New Delhi, India. This conference featured strong participation by national authorities and set a course for UNSIC's work in 2008, with a request for assistance with developing a medium-term strategy for improved human and animal health, as well as broadening the pandemic preparedness planning efforts. This work is now underway.