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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 21st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 10 July 2006, at 10 a.m.

<u>President:</u>	Mr. HACHANI	(Tunisia)
later:	Mr. HANNESSON (Vice-President)	(Iceland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

SPECIAL EVENT ON AVIAN INFLUENZA: A GLOBAL EMERGENCY

The PRESIDENT said that the avian influenza virus had spread dramatically over the previous five months, during which 32 countries in Africa, Europe and the Middle East had reported cases of infection in migratory or domestic birds, twice the number of countries affected during the previous two and a half years. Although there was no evidence that the virus could spread easily among the general public, the recently confirmed case of human-to-human transmission showed the need for urgent action to minimize the risk of a human influenza pandemic. He called on all Member States to deliver quickly the funds pledged at the International Pledging Conference on Avian and Human Influenza, held in Beijing in January 2006.

The threat of a pandemic must be treated as a global emergency. The current outbreak had already generated substantial economic costs, and its spread would have far-reaching consequences if global trade in goods and services ground to a halt. It had been suggested that a human pandemic could lead to a 2 per cent loss of global gross domestic product (GDP), with the greatest impact on the developing countries, especially the least developed countries. Avian influenza must not be allowed to undermine those countries' ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The United Nations had a leading role to play in the coordination of efforts to curb the spread of the disease. The success of those efforts depended on raising awareness of the threat, ensuring transparency and credibility in the identification of outbreaks, containing outbreaks effectively and maintaining an adequate level of preparedness. Preparedness required the coordination of worldwide scientific research into vaccines and effective antiviral drugs.

The Economic and Social Council's mandate to improve system-wide coordination placed it in an ideal position to set goals and benchmarks that could influence international and national policies, while its mandate to promote dialogue on global economic, social and environmental policies and to complement international responses to humanitarian emergencies required it to place the question of new and re-emerging diseases on its long-term agenda. He was confident that the panel discussion to follow would provide a clearer picture of the current

state of the virus, its possible economic and social impact, and the latest prevention efforts. He urged delegations to pay particular attention to the questions of adequate global coordination, predictable and timely technical and financial assistance and the implications of the emergency for the United Nations agencies involved.

Mr. HARCHARIK (Deputy Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that FAO was at the forefront of the fight against highly pathogenic avian influenza, one of the most threatening animal diseases the world had ever had to face. The threat posed by the disease was aggravated by the fact that, in addition to its intrinsic virulence, it could be transmitted to humans through contact with infected animals and might even mutate into a form transmissible between humans and give rise to a lethal pandemic. In addition, the disease was having a disastrous economic impact. Some 200 million poultry had died or been culled as a consequence of the disease, causing a loss of revenue to farmers and producers running into billions of dollars. In addition, the fall in consumption and prices had ruined countless traders and others earning a living from the sale of a cheap and readily available source of protein the world over.

Fortunately, the countries concerned, with the help of the global community, had reacted decisively to check the disease. The measures taken were incorporated into a global strategy designed by FAO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). A number of successes had been achieved; in many countries in South-East Asia and western Europe the disease had been checked, brought under control or even eradicated. Significantly, where the disease in poultry was checked, the number of human cases fell. However, the danger remained that the disease would again spread. There were still 32 countries in which the infection was officially present. He was particularly concerned about Africa, where control measures that had proved effective in East Asia and Europe were particularly difficult to enforce, and where there was a real danger of the disease becoming endemic.

An additional problem was that of illegal poultry trading, which was extremely difficult to control. The movement of poultry and poultry products from one region or country to another was one of the main vehicles for the spread of the virus; it was essential that the veterinary authorities take stricter measures to block those movements. Another risk was the formation of

“permanent reservoirs” of the virus, namely lakes or marshes in which the water was contaminated by the virus and posed a continuing threat to the bird population there, and by implication to human populations as well. The recent FAO-OIE International Scientific Conference on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds, held in Rome, had called for increased surveillance and research in that respect.

A three-year global programme to control and eradicate the disease had been established in 2004 at an estimated cost of US\$ 494 million. Since then, with the spread of the disease, the estimated cost had risen to US\$ 882 million. Cooperation with other organizations was excellent. FAO and OIE concentrated on prevention and control of the disease in poultry; WHO dealt with the human aspects of the disease and prepared contingency plans for an epidemic; and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) was working with FAO to develop tools for educating people to protect themselves and giving farmers access to vital information. A partnership with the World Bank was in place; and FAO was a member of the United Nations System Influenza Coordination (UNSIC) group. While the danger of a spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza would remain present for a number of years, with appropriate funding, firm political resolve and sound international partnerships the disease could be held in check in birds and the risk of a pandemic among humans greatly reduced.

Dr. CHAN (Assistant Director-General for Communicable Diseases, WHO) said that avian influenza had taken just two years to infect 60 countries. WHO had been providing training and technical support to many countries in order to avoid outbreaks of the disease and had conducted 50 country missions to assess the extent of the disease. It had also prepared a strategy document spelling out the actions needed to support member States and drawing their attention to events such as the Economic and Social Council’s first special event on avian influenza, held in November 2005.

At a meeting co-sponsored by WHO in November 2005 on avian influenza and human pandemic influenza, a global consensus had been reached on the technical standards for controlling the disease and the importance of a rapid response and political commitment had been stressed. Subsequently WHO had drafted a containment protocol in which the roles and responses of WHO and member States in the event of a pandemic were specified. WHO also coordinated scientific research into the disease at the global level.

The countries in which the public health and agricultural sectors worked in tandem had been most successful in preventing or containing outbreaks of avian influenza, while those with mass education campaigns and optimum agricultural surveillance had also succeeded in curbing the spread of the disease. It was encouraging that no human cases had as yet been reported in Africa. Nevertheless, countries needed assistance in securing core capacities to respond to emergencies; WHO was coordinating such assistance with other agencies.

Mr. INGRAM (World Bank) said that, according to World Bank estimates, a severe worldwide pandemic of avian influenza with a mortality rate of about 1 per cent would cost the world economy about 3.1 per cent of GDP. The macroeconomic effect of avian influenza had so far been quite limited, but its effect on the poultry sector had been drastic, with enormous declines in demand for poultry owing to public fears of infection. There was a need to improve communication about the risk of avian influenza to humans; that risk was still very low.

The World Bank had co-sponsored the Beijing international pledging conference and was currently establishing a multi-donor trust fund, the Avian and Human Influenza Facility, or AHIF. It was working with international technical agencies to improve policy advice on key issues such as compensation for culling and strategic vaccination of poultry. Through its emergency assistance procedures, the Bank was supporting the country-led model endorsed at the Beijing conference, and had approved \$147.5 million of assistance for programmes in 11 countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nigeria, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkey and Viet Nam. It was now preparing and appraising programmes and financing in over 30 more countries, with accumulative commitments projected to reach about \$300 million by the end of 2006.

As most of the pledges made at the Beijing conference were for bilateral aid, it was particularly important to ensure coordination. The Bank had agreed to work with UNSIC to monitor and report on implementation, gaps and overlaps and to report to donors on progress. The first report had been issued just before the current meeting.

Notwithstanding a strong donor response, some serious gaps remained. AHIF was relatively modest in scope, which meant that bilateral aid was all the more necessary. In

addition, because the AHIF pledges had been made before the influenza had spread extensively, they had been earmarked for Asia and the Middle East, leaving nearly none of the fund's resources available for use in countries in Africa and the Americas. Specialized international agencies such as WHO, FAO and OIE required adequate financing, especially as the fight against avian influenza extended to countries with weaker veterinary and health systems. It should be noted that most of the financing for integrated country programmes came from multilateral development banks in the form of loans or credits, not grants, and such funds were issued at the expense of other projects.

Mr. BATCHELOR (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP) said that avian influenza had already had a devastating economic impact on rural households and wage labourers who had lost their jobs. A global pandemic would be catastrophic, especially for the poor. To contain the threat, government ministries dealing with agriculture, human and animal health, finance, planning and tourism must work together, along with local authorities, to build technical capacity, devise compensation schemes, restructure the poultry sector and find alternative livelihood strategies.

Of the \$1.9 billion pledged to combat avian influenza at the Beijing international pledging conference, nearly all had been earmarked for loans or had been committed to specific country programmes. The funding was therefore insufficient to meet current needs.

The plan drawn up by UNSIC tasked UNDP with assisting the least developed countries, with special emphasis on the needs of sub-Saharan Africa, which was already affected by HIV/AIDS, violent conflict and extreme poverty. As manager of the United Nations resident coordinator system, UNDP would establish the framework for inter-agency response, ensuring coordination and coherence during implementation and interfacing with national Governments, inter alia by assisting in the development of realistic and effective preparedness and response plans. It would also help them review alternative compensation schemes for those affected by the outbreak, paying due attention to the unintended impacts of such measures on local and national markets and economies, and helping Governments to ensure business continuity in the affected countries.

Ms. ROONEY (International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO) said that since the November 2005 meeting on avian influenza co-sponsored by WHO, FAO, OIE and the World Bank, ICAO had coordinated the drafting of aviation-related preparedness guidelines. Draft guidelines for States had been drawn up in consultation with WHO, Airports Council International and the International Air Transport Association (IATA), and had been sent to the national aviation authorities. More detailed guidelines for airports and airlines had also been drawn up.

In aviation, where the number of organizations involved - both governmental and non-governmental - was very large and speed of response was critical, communication was crucial, and must be organized well in advance of any crisis. To simplify communications and ensure consistency, ideally, all United Nations agencies dealing with health-related issues should refer to a single, Web-based information source, which would have to be kept up to date and relevant. In the event of a pandemic, ICAO would need to know rapidly what screening or preventive measures were required for passengers and cargo, what questions should figure in any questionnaire, what areas travellers should avoid and what precautions they should take. The closing of an airport to routine traffic would have vast logistical and economic consequences. It would be necessary to specify rules for the transport not only of food and animals, but also of infectious samples.

To handle such questions as they arose and to help keep the website up to date, it would be advisable to have in place a United Nations crisis management office. It was crucial to ensure that in each region of the world there were expert teams ready to provide advice for all those involved in aviation - Governments, airports and airlines. ICAO was currently setting up such a regional team in Asia and, if successful, would do the same in the other regions of the world.

Mr. ABDEL-GHAFFAR (World Tourism Organization, UNWTO) said that because of the nature of tourism, the tourist industry was extremely sensitive to all types of crises, including natural disasters, geopolitical strife and societal problems such as outbreaks of disease. UNWTO had played a leading role in dealing with such crises, but it had now become clear that ad hoc responses must give way to a more structured approach. UNWTO had set up a risk assessment and management working group to guide the organization's response to avian influenza and any other crises. It had also decided to draw up an action and resource plan to deal

specifically with avian influenza. UNWTO had worked closely with UNSIC, WHO and FAO, and supported the coordinated United Nations preparedness and response plan. It sought specifically to ensure the full involvement of tourism administrations in the preparation of each national preparedness plan. It had also requested that its members designate senior-level coordinators to deal with avian influenza. About half had already done so, and some 25 countries had outlined their national preparedness plans for the tourism sector.

UNWTO was working to ensure cohesiveness of the tourism industry's response, which was quite fragmented. It had set up a tourism emergency response network that hopefully would extend to all countries. It was also working to ensure the efficiency and timeliness of United Nations system technical and operational cooperation at the country level, for example through guidelines and distance learning, and was liaising with the relevant United Nations specialized agencies. It was now planning to develop more preparedness tools, such as pre-packaged presentations, checklists and real-time simulation exercises, along with new training and technical assistance activities.

Mr. BLEWITT (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC) said that while most regions had fairly advanced avian influenza preparedness plans, in South and Central America relatively few Governments had any such plans, and even fewer included Red Cross national societies in their plans. The situation was better in a few countries of the Americas, including Brazil, Canada, Haiti and the United States of America. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was scaling up its activities in China, Indonesia and Viet Nam, and national societies were working as auxiliaries with health ministries, inter alia in China, Egypt, India, Kenya, Nigeria and Viet Nam. IFRC had named a special envoy for influenza to enhance advocacy and representation, as it believed that communication was crucial. It considered that a greater effort was required at the global and regional levels to address the issue of livelihoods and compensation.

Countries with weak human or veterinary health systems were of particular concern, as a failure to combat avian influenza would be tragic for their populations and would also affect people well beyond their borders. Civil society partners were particularly well suited to serve hard-to-reach populations, and should be involved in any work dealing with avian influenza. While IFRC had received some funding for its global avian influenza appeal, more was needed.

Mr. FU Cong (China) expressed his Government's appreciation for the work done by the various agencies, particularly by WHO, to combat avian influenza. Countries must honour the pledges they had made at the Beijing International Pledging Conference on Avian and Human Influenza in order to provide timely and sufficient support for international cooperation. His Government had pledged some \$10 million; it had already disbursed the part earmarked for WHO, and was in the process of paying the portions allocated to other specialized agencies. It was necessary to strengthen capacity-building, for example by improving global surveillance and early warning systems and by assisting the developing countries, in particular in Africa, with the required technical and financial support.

To increase the chances of achieving an early breakthrough in ways to deal with avian influenza, the entire international community must cooperate in scientific research. At the same time, such efforts must respect intellectual property rights, and costs for the purchase and production of any effective medicines must be reduced for the developing countries.

Ms. FERNANDEZ (Observer for Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that in the overall global response, it was necessary to concentrate on improving the surveillance and control capacities of the developing countries. The human resource crisis and the weak veterinary and human health systems in such countries, and particularly in Africa, were a cause of serious concern. Such services were directly linked to a country's ability to prevent or contain a possible pandemic.

The United Nations, its specialized agencies, OIE and the World Bank had worked well together in a spirit of international solidarity. They must be given the necessary operational means and resources, and must be flexible enough to respond quickly to changing situations and unforeseen needs. It would be crucial to monitor the situation of avian influenza in wildfowl and in waterfowl breeding areas, for example in northern Eurasia, and to rapidly eradicate it from poultry there. It was also of the utmost importance to implement the revised WHO international health regulations, if possible even before they entered into force in January 2007. The European Union member States were dedicated to honouring the commitments made at the Beijing pledging conference, and supported the work undertaken by the United Nations and the

international financial institutions. She asked what could be done to support the creation of early warning systems for animal health, including surveillance of wildfowl and poultry, and to assist in the stockpiling of drugs in order to ensure rapid containment.

Mr. RECINOS TREJO (Observer for El Salvador) stressed the importance of international cooperation in responding to avian influenza, including with regard to the development of national plans and systems for prevention. As the representative of a member of the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, he wished to highlight the important work being done on the link between wildlife and avian influenza by the working group made up of representatives of parties to the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and of organizations such as BirdLife International and Wetlands International. Great progress had been made in the areas of research and exchange of information. Given the importance of monitoring migratory species, those efforts should be coordinated with those of other international mechanisms.

Mr. PAVLOV (Russian Federation) said that, unlike in past outbreaks of disease, there had been timely warning of the current threat and there was thus a unique opportunity to follow its development and, in the best case, to prevent its realization, thanks in particular to the efforts of international organizations such as WHO. To do so, each country must be in a position to exercise reliable and high-quality control over the unpredictable spread and behaviour of the influenza, and in the event of a pandemic outbreak, each must be able to localize it and isolate it in time. The international organizations had set out clear instructions and guidelines on measures to be taken, including in the WHO international health regulations. It remained for the individual States to work together energetically, to communicate with one another and to support other States, especially those that were most in need. Any infection was hard to control, but one that was carried by birds obviously could not be prevented from crossing international borders and would be particularly unpredictable. Fighting avian influenza was of such importance that it had been placed on the agenda of the upcoming G-8 summit, and the political and financial

decisions to be made at that event would hopefully increase preparedness. The main role of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Council and the specialized agencies was to mobilize the financial, human and technical resources required to control the outbreak and to ensure coordination and avoid duplication.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said the least developed countries needed significant international support to meet the threat of avian influenza, which could threaten the development gains made in countries like his own. He therefore welcomed, in particular, the commitment made by the European Union at the Beijing pledging conference, and was sure other development partners would be just as forthcoming. His delegation was ready to examine all possible ways to coordinate efforts for optimal benefits. He wondered whether the WHO draft containment protocol on pandemic influenza applied only to that organization or whether it would be implemented in the context of system-wide efforts.

Mr. RIMDAP (Nigeria) wondered if the International Labour Organization (ILO) had considered the effect of avian influenza on workers. The detection of avian influenza in Nigeria had created panic amongst the population. Poultry farmers and the poor were often the most affected by an outbreak of avian influenza and workers likewise feared contamination through the food supply. Some thought must therefore be given to the economic impact of avian influenza. With regard to funding assistance, he wondered how much funding was available and how it had been allocated. He also asked whether there had been sufficiently early warning of the outbreak of avian influenza, whether the initial response had been adequate and whether the worst was over.

Ms. KANCHANAHATTAKIJ (Thailand) said that although to date human-to-human spread of avian influenza had been rare and confined to closed circles of individuals, if a pandemic occurred, the poor would be most affected. The international community, led by the United Nations, and WHO in particular, should encourage pharmaceutical companies to invest in the production of human vaccine and antiviral medications to ensure that adequate supplies were available. It should be possible to guarantee producers a reasonable return on their investment while at the same time providing vaccines and medication at affordable prices.

She was optimistic that strengthened coordination and action at the national, regional and international levels would be successful in meeting the threat posed by avian influenza. Her Government was ready to cooperate fully in such efforts and was working to ensure rapid detection and reporting of any outbreaks. It was important to provide poultry owners and producers with compensation for any adverse economic effects of an outbreak in order to encourage prompt reporting. She stressed the importance of providing accurate information, for example by stressing that well-cooked poultry posed no risk to human health, in order to avoid affecting world poultry markets, which would be very harmful to producer countries.

Mr. MILLER (United States of America) recalled that his Government had launched the international partnership on avian pandemic influenza at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2005. Partners had met twice since then, most recently in Vienna, and progress had been made towards increasing awareness of the problem, tracking contributions against a multi-donor framework, encouraging further donations, increasing transparency and promoting scientific cooperation and rapid reporting.

With a view to strengthening early warning and response capacity, in May 2006 his Government had published an implementation plan for its national strategy for pandemic influenza, the objectives of which were: to establish surveillance capacity in countries at risk; to strengthen international animal-health infrastructure; to coordinate the response of the international community in support of national efforts to contain outbreaks; and to coordinate communication efforts. At the Beijing and Vienna conferences, his Government had announced pledges of \$334 million and \$28 million respectively; it had also allocated \$36 million through international organizations and \$41 million for international research activities.

He would like to know if the map presented by Mr. Harcharik, indicating that there had been few outbreaks of avian influenza in wild birds outside Europe, was accurate or simply reflected a lack of data. He would also like to know if much progress had been made towards identifying focal points for the application of the WHO international health regulations on a volunteer basis, and whether WHO was able to supply the information Ms. Rooney had said ICAO would require immediately in the case of a human outbreak of avian influenza.

Mr. AL FARISI (Indonesia) said 52 confirmed cases of the H5N1 avian influenza virus had been confirmed in Indonesia; 40 of the individuals affected had died. The largest cluster of cases had been in Sumatra, where seven members of one family had died. The avian influenza virus was considered to be entrenched in the poultry population and, as a result, Indonesia had the highest number of human cases of avian influenza.

His Government was making every effort to deal with the avian influenza problem; the National Committee for Avian Influenza Control and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness, in cooperation with WHO and other partners, had organized an expert meeting to review the current status of H5N1 in both humans and animals, recommend control measures, share lessons learned with regard to reporting and containment, and provide an authoritative risk assessment of avian influenza in Indonesia. His Government had allocated US\$ 160 million to its national strategy to combat and monitor avian influenza and promote preparedness.

The major challenges to an effective response to avian influenza were lack of financing, low public awareness and the lack of an effective response to address the economic and social impacts of avian influenza. The United Nations system must assist the developing countries in strengthening their capacity to deal with those challenges and WHO should ensure that affordable vaccines and related health-care services of international quality were available to the developing countries. The international community must work together to meet the threat posed by both the current sporadic outbreaks of avian influenza and possible human-to-human transmission of the virus in the future.

Ms. MUDIE (Australia) expressed support for international efforts to develop a coordinated and targeted approach to the threat posed by avian influenza, which could have a disastrous impact on health, well-being, poverty reduction and economic gains in Asia, especially for the most marginalized groups and small island States.

Her Government was working to strengthen regional capacity and in November 2005 had announced the allocation of 100 million Australian dollars over four years to combat avian influenza and other emerging infectious diseases, in addition to 47 million Australian dollars already allocated to a range of bilateral and regional initiatives, much of which had been provided to WHO and FAO for international coordination efforts. Her Government would

provide funding for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) action plan on the prevention of and response to avian and influenza pandemics, including for the establishment of a register of experts in the fields of animal and human health and disaster response. The previous month, in cooperation with Singapore, Australia had led the APEC pandemic response exercise aimed at testing communication networks among member States. Her Government would continue to help fund country programmes related to avian influenza across the region in order to strengthen planning, prevention, response capacity, capacity-building and disaster preparation, in cooperation with international partners.

As part of her Government's commitment to assisting developing countries, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, its overseas aid budget would be doubled by 2010, which should lead to a doubling of assistance in the field of health. Whether or not an avian influenza pandemic materialized, the work being done by the international community to increase preparedness and strengthen infrastructure would be invaluable in meeting any future crisis. She therefore welcomed the opportunity to work with and learn from neighbouring countries and international partners.

Mr. CABRAL (Guinea-Bissau) said some countries were more vulnerable than others to the effects of avian influenza and he therefore welcomed the recognition by the European Union of the need to assist the developing countries. African countries in particular lacked the means to adequately meet the challenge posed by avian influenza: veterinarian health systems were inadequate and the fact that the population lived in close proximity to birds and animals meant that they were especially vulnerable to infection and made it difficult to impose stringent sanitary conditions. Adequate compensation should be provided to those populations for the economic effects of avian influenza.

Mr. CONTINI (France) underscored the central role of the United Nations and other international organizations in coordinating the response to avian influenza. That response must be based on sound veterinary and health systems, especially in the African countries. He welcomed the rapid implementation of the WHO international health regulations, which provided a means of strengthening international capacity for epidemic response, both with regard to avian influenza and any future threats to health.

Mr. EZOKOLA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said the least developed countries' capacity to respond to the threat of avian influenza in an effective and appropriate manner must be strengthened. He welcomed the efforts of UNDP in that regard, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Mr. Batchelor had not mentioned any timetable, however, and he wondered whether that meant that a minimum structure already existed which would allow for an urgent response to any outbreak or whether the necessary mechanisms had yet to be established.

Mr. KIVANÇ (Turkey) said information-sharing and transparency should be important elements of the international community's response to avian influenza. He urged the implementation of the international health regulations and observance of bio-safety rules by countries at risk. He requested information on the source of the statistics in the presentation made by the representative of FAO and also asked for information on when and how the nearly \$2 billion pledged by the international community at the Beijing conference would be distributed.

Mr. QUIBLIER (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) said that as a result of concerns about the role of migratory birds as vectors for the spread of avian influenza, in April of that year UNEP had organized, in cooperation with the Ramsar Convention secretariat, a seminar on avian influenza, wild birds and the environment, which had made a number of recommendations on developing a comprehensive early-warning monitoring system. He also recalled that at the March meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity, it had been pointed out that many species might be affected by avian influenza, which could affect biodiversity, and that the decrease in genetic diversity among domesticated animals and poultry had decreased resistance to disease.

Mr. VAHER (UNICEF) said that UNICEF had mobilized its offices in 140 countries to support national efforts to mitigate the effects of avian influenza, focusing on communication and capacity-building. In particular, it had sought to enhance understanding of the disease at all levels so that critical actions relating to children could be taken in a coordinated manner. Priority actions and strategies agreed with WHO and FAO had formed the basis of its key messages. It wished to acknowledge the significant financial contribution of the Government of Japan to the mobilization of UNICEF offices in Asia and Africa.

Mr. THIERMANN (OIE) said it should be remembered that the virus under discussion affected poultry and had yet to demonstrate the ability to spread easily from human to human. There was still time for preventive action to control the virus in poultry, thereby reducing the risk of human exposure. There was a strong correlation between the environmental load of the H5N1 virus in poultry and the possibility of a genetic evolution to a more aggressive form affecting humans. The potential steps in the evolution of avian influenza to a pandemic form were: from poultry to poultry; from poultry to wildlife and back to poultry; from poultry to humans; and from humans to humans. While there was a need for information on how the virus was spread by wildlife, attention and action should be focused on poultry. Strengthening the capacity of veterinary services, and offering incentives for early reporting at the local and national level, was essential. Properly administered vaccines, and financial compensation for loss of poultry, were among the tools proven to be effective in combating and limiting infection. As to the question posed by the representative of the United States concerning the apparent concentration of cases of wildlife infection in Europe, that impression probably reflected the quality of surveillance. It should also be noted that the infection of wildlife by some strains of influenza was temporary so that there were grounds for hoping that the risk posed by the virus might lessen in the future, unless wildlife was reinfected from poultry.

Mr. HARCHARIK (Deputy Director-General, FAO) said that the data presented by FAO were compiled from official government sources, reference laboratories and other confirmed sources of information. The data covered the period 2003-2006 and were updated by material to be found on the FAO website.

Dr. CHAN (Assistant Director-General for Communicable Diseases, WHO) said that WHO would soon be placing on its website a global action plan identifying gaps and priorities relating to vaccine research and development and to issues such as supply and demand and affordable access. Concerning the global stockpile of antivirals, WHO had received two substantial donations from Roche Pharmaceuticals, which were being used in the containment strategy designed to extinguish any outbreaks of the pandemic in its very earliest stages. The WHO draft containment protocol, which imposed duties and responsibilities on WHO and its member States, would need to be discussed with other organizations of the United Nations system before any decision could be taken on its system-wide implementation.

The World Health Assembly had recently passed a resolution calling for immediate voluntary compliance with the international health regulations before they became effective in June 2007. WHO member States would shortly be sent reminders concerning the need to nominate focal points in order to receive timely information on all matters relating to avian influenza. With reference to the questions raised by the representative of ICAO, she did not yet have the answers for the reason that the pandemic had not yet emerged and its characteristics were not yet known. What WHO had to put in place was a system of real-time monitoring using a network of experts to provide assessments and information, as it had done for the epidemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). In the meantime, it had posted on its website some 50 updated guidelines concerning all aspects of pandemic preparedness and containment.

Mr. INGRAM (World Bank) said that of the \$1.9 billion pledged in Beijing about \$1.1 billion had been committed and \$330 million actually disbursed. It was worth noting that many country-led programmes originating in sub-Saharan Africa, which had been little affected by the early manifestations of avian influenza, were being approved.

Mr. NABARRO (Senior United Nations System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza) said that the main lessons to emerge from the discussion concerned the need to regard pandemics as threats to the very existence of humanity; to mobilize activities around national plans geared to the medium and long term as well as to short-term emergencies; to strengthen political commitment and international support for countries lacking financial and technical resources; to engage civil society and maintain the involvement of science and scientists; to ensure strong communications; to increase the volume and rate of disbursement of resources; to improve coordination at the regional and international levels; and to remain focused and avoid complacency.

The PRESIDENT announced that he was distributing in the meeting room a Presidential statement on avian influenza. The statement was not a negotiated text and gave his own views on the current situation and on what could be done by the Economic and Social Council and the international community.

The meeting was suspended at 12.40 p.m. and resumed at 12.50 p.m.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued)
(E/2006/21, E/2006/68, E/2006/76 and E/2006/87)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to consider the requests of four intergovernmental organizations to participate in the work of the Economic and Social Council. They were the Ramsar Convention secretariat (E/2006/21), the South Centre (E/2006/68), the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (E/2006/76) and the International Emergency Management Organization (E/2006/87). After reviewing the applications of the four organizations, the Bureau had decided to recommend that they be authorized to participate without the right to vote in the deliberations of the Council on questions within the scope of their activities, in accordance with rule 79 of the Council's rules of procedure.

Mr. LARENAS SERRANO (Observer for Ecuador), speaking in support of the application by the Ramsar Convention secretariat to participate in the work of the Council, said that his Government had been concerned for some time about the unclear legal status of the secretariat, which prevented it from contributing to debates on subjects - such as avian influenza - that concerned it directly. As the representative of a member of the Standing Committee of the Convention and further to the resolution adopted at the Ninth Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention in November 2005, he urged the Council to grant observer status to the secretariat.

Mr. MILLER (United States of America) asked how many intergovernmental organizations had been accorded some kind of status by the Council. Were any standards applied in such cases - relating, for example, to the size of the organization, its budget, its activities, the length of time it had been in existence? What rights did recognition by the Council confer? It might be easier to grant observer status to organizations if their admission on an ad hoc basis meant that their participation was restricted to a particular agenda item or discussion. As it was, the Council's crowded agenda left insufficient time for Member States to speak, especially when it included extensive presentations by various secretariats.

He had concerns about each of the four institutions that had submitted applications to the Council. While he considered the Ramsar Convention a good treaty, he questioned whether its secretariat was an intergovernmental organization. The letter of application itself suggested that

the secretariat was attempting to use the process of becoming associated with the Economic and Social Council to define its nature as an intergovernmental organization. The Ramsar Convention secretariat was in his view a treaty body, and the Council should consider whether it wished to accord association status to all treaty bodies before proceeding further.

Concerning the South Centre, the somewhat polemical presentation by its representative at the current session prompted concerns about the possible politicization of the Council's debates. He wondered whether the Centre might not have an opportunity to express its views through the Group of 77, to which he understood it gave advice. He would need more information on the Centre and its activities before agreeing to grant it observer status with the Council. He likewise wished to know more about the Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development, which seemed to be a forum rather than an intergovernmental organization, and the International Emergency Management Organization, whose membership appeared to comprise only three countries.

Mr. RAUBENHEIMER (South Africa) said that the South Centre should, like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), have the right to address the Council directly rather than through its member States.

The PRESIDENT proposed that the Council suspend consideration of the question pending a response by its secretariat to the concerns expressed by the representative of the United States of America.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.