

61st Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue - Vienna, 18-21 April 2006

Note provided by the European Commission - DG RELEX C.1 -

Subject: Avian flu and potential human pandemic

The development of the avian flu epidemic poses a new and unprecedented challenge for the EU and the world. Over the past year, the EU has taken action against avian influenza based on two priorities:

(1) Preventing the spread of the disease. The EU has worked intensively with affected countries to help them cope with the situation, providing laboratory testing and technical assistance aimed at containment of outbreaks in bird populations. The EC and the Member States have provided aid directly and were instrumental in helping the World Bank establish a multi-donor trust fund for avian flu. Within the Union, the EU has imposed import bans on live birds, feathers and poultry meat from affected countries.

(2) Preparation and response in the event of spread: During the past several years, the EU acted to improve readiness and response capabilities within the EU. For instance, all 25 Member States have developed national preparedness plans, the EU is working to ensure sufficient production capacity for vaccines and adequate supplies of anti-viral drugs, and it has recently organised simulation exercises to test the effectiveness of the system.

The Commission co-sponsored the Beijing International Conference on Avian Flu, held in January this year. The conference managed to raise USD 1.9 billion to fight against influenza. The Commission pledged € 100 million to countries in Asia, neighbourhood countries, Africa and to research projects. In addition, individual Member States pledged a combined € 114 million. The conference was attended by more than 120 countries who adopted the "Beijing Declaration" that provides the core principles of a global partnership. The participants committed to a coordinated, long-term partnership to control avian influenza, including sharing technical and scientific expertise and resources. Follow-up meetings, including a June meeting of senior officials in Vienna, will track progress in financing and implementation of initiatives. The EU will work for an open and multilateral partnership that is owned by the partners themselves.

The EU and U.S. working groups on the avian flu remain in close contact. The European Commission has monthly video-conferences with U.S. authorities, and technical contacts take place daily between the relevant services. EU-U.S. also work closely together on assessment and technical assistance in international organisations, such as the WHO and FAO.

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*Seppo Nurmi, DG RELEX C1,
based on input from Canice Nolan, EC Delegation in Washington DC.*