

**NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT
(H.E. Mr. Munir Akram (Pakistan))**

Special Event on the theme of “*Avian Flu*”

Opening Statement

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and guests,

I wish to welcome you to the Special Event of the Economic and Social Council on the theme “Avian and Human Influenza”. This special event is part of a series of initiatives that focus on strengthening the work of the Council by addressing key challenges faced by the international community. We launched the series with a very successful meeting last week on food crises in Africa. The special event series can be considered a concrete implementation of the outcome of the Summit held last September.

Excellencies,

We are facing another re-emerging disease, the Avian flu, which is spreading outside its area of emergence and of which we know very little - except that it is a possible global threat. Avian (or bird) flu, like SARS, HIV/AIDS and other new and re-emerging diseases, has demonstrated that no country is exempt from the spread of infectious diseases. We have seen the virus spread from Asia to the Middle East and Europe along the path of migratory birds. There are now fears that it will spread to Africa, where experts believe health and economic consequences could be severe.

One key lesson of the past is that if these new and emerging diseases are not quickly and effectively contained, they could significantly aggravate global threats and

problems, and not only in terms of health but also in financial, trade and even security areas. As was the case with SARS, the fear of the spread of Avian flu might lead many countries and corporations to take measures which could be costly both for the country concerned and the global economy as a whole. However, the costs of prevention will also be quite significant. Control measures, like culling of poultry in quarantine areas, will have a severe impact on the livelihood of poultry farmers, particularly in developing countries. As usual in such situations, the poor would be particularly hard hit, as poultry is a major source of affordable protein and income and, moreover, poor farmers also live in close proximity to animals, which facilitates a more readily spread of the virus from animals to humans.

Avian flu, like SARS, HIV/AIDS and other new and re-emerging diseases, tell us, again and again, that strong and coherent global collaboration and sustainable partnership are required for an effective response to such global threats. We must pay particular attention to the needs of developing world. We know too well that many developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, already bear a heavy burden of disease, malnutrition, poor infrastructure and inadequate institutions. These countries often lack adequate scientific capacity to track new and re-emerging diseases and respond to them, and they need both technical and financial assistance in designing and implementing preparedness and response plans. For this reason, the role of development cooperation will be essential in responding to avian flu and possible future pandemics.

The 2005 World Summit made important decisions in this regard. It stressed the urgency and the imperative of developing and strengthening health system in developing countries. It called to ensure the full implementation of International Health Regulations, including the need to support the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network of the WHO. We need to take immediate measures to implement these steps if we want to defend humanity against potentially devastating effects of a pandemic.

ECOSOC applauds the combined efforts of Food and Agricultural Organization, the World Health Organization and other entities that have led to greater awareness of

this global threat. We hope that quick and coordinated action of these two organizations - and the UN system as a whole - to control the spread of the flu will limit its geographical reach, impact and human and economic costs.

Excellencies,

I congratulate the Secretary General for his leadership on this issue. His appointment last September of a Senior United Nations System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza is a recognition of the prominence of health in the United Nations development agenda, particularly in view of the risks posed by ill-health and disease to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We shall hear more from the Senior Coordinator on how the UN system intends to support developing countries and countries in transition to face this new global threat.

As the locus for coordination of the UN system, the Council would certainly encourage all Agencies, Funds and Programmes, within their respective mandates, more intensively to consider how to address health, which is a cross-cutting issue, in their activities and to ensure that there is a coherent and coordinated approach and tangible and sustainable results for real people on the ground

In terms of its mandate on promoting dialogue on global policies and trends in the economic, social and environmental fields as well as supporting and complementing international efforts aimed at addressing “potential” humanitarian emergencies, the Council may wish to consider how best to address the question of new and re-emerging diseases as part of its long-term agenda.

Excellencies,

Clearly, this issue appears likely to be a recurring theme for some time to come, particularly in a globalized world where international travel and migration are the norm and new and re-emerging diseases can spread rapidly across continents . The Avian flu,

like HIV/AIDS and SARS, is therefore a call for collective action – a call for more support for investment and research in vaccines and for actions that would ensure that the entire world shares in burden and costs - but also the fruits - of prevention and care. To this end, donors and the international financial institutions may consider setting up a fund to help countries put in place preparedness and response plans, and to compensate farmers and producers for losses incurred in culling their poultry.

The Avian flu problem is also one that calls for strengthening of our collaboration - at all levels, and among all relevant partners. Recent experience showed once again that when a disaster strikes, it is often the country's military and police who are the first responders, who are sufficiently equipped and organized to provide vital initial efforts. Do we have in place an effective system of communication and collaboration among these first responders, humanitarian agencies, and others? What are lessons learned? What do we need to do to ensure that we can provide an effective response to a disaster or a pandemic when it strikes?

The issue that is on our agenda today is symptomatic of the challenges that the international community and the United Nations family are facing: it is urgent, global and cross-cutting, necessitating a concerted sustained effort by all. It is also exactly the kind of challenge that the new mandates given to the Council by the recent Summit are designed to address.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

To deepen the reflection on these issues, I am glad to have a number of distinguished panelists that I will introduce and give them the floor to make a statement on the topic. I wish to thank them for accepting our invitation and being at the Economic and Social Council in New York today.

I first have the pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency, Mr. Jan Eliasson, President of the Sixtieth Session of the General Assembly to make a statement.

You have the floor Excellency.

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I thank Mr. Eliasson for his statement.

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I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Ms. Louise Fresco is Assistant Director-General for Agriculture at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) make a statement.

You have the floor Madam.

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I thank Ms. Fresco for her statement.

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I now invite Dr. David Heymann, Assistant Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) to make a statement.

You have the floor Sir.

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I thank Dr. Heymann for his statement.

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I now give the floor to Dr. David Nabarro, Senior United Nations System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza to make a statement. He is responsible for ensuring that the United Nations system makes an effective and coordinated contribution to the global effort to control the epidemic of avian influenza.

You have the floor Sir.

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I thank Dr. Nabarro for his statement.

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I now invite Mrs. Margareta Walstrohm, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator to make a statement.

You have the floor Madam.

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I thank Mrs. Walstrohm for her statement.

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I thank the panelists for their presentations and I would now like to open the floor for comments and questions.

1. Malaysia
2. Canada
3. China
4. _____
5. _____

We have thus concluded with our discussion today on such an important topic and I would like to extend my most hearty and warm welcome to all of you and our distinguished guests for having kindly joined us and sharing your views and inputs for this special event.

The meeting is adjourned.