

**PRESS RELEASE**

A fund to help countries contend with avian flu called for by UN Economic and Social Council President

WHO and FAO experts assess looming global threat at special ECOSOC session

(UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 3 November) – The international community should consider quickly establishing a fund to help developing countries take preventive action against a possible avian flu pandemic among humans, as well as to compensate farmers and producers for the costs of culling poultry, UN Economic and Social Council President Munir Akram told a special meeting of ECOSOC today.

Compensation for losses in the poultry industry is considered particularly important by experts not only to avoid crippling economic damage, but to reduce disincentives farmers and others might have to report new flu cases.

“Clearly, avian flu and other new and re-emerging diseases are going to be a recurring theme for some time to come, particularly in a globalized world where [they] can spread rapidly across continents,” Ambassador Akram (Pakistan) said in opening remarks to the special session. “The situation calls for collective action – for more support for global public goods like investment and research in vaccines and for actions that would ensure that the entire world shares in the burden and costs of prevention.”

Participants at the Special Event on Avian Flu organized by ECOSOC stressed that if a pandemic emerged, it could entail millions of deaths, grave economic losses and depletion of already weak health systems of developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. These countries typically lack adequate scientific capacity to track and respond to new and re-emerging diseases and need both technical and financial assistance in developing and implementing preparedness and response plans.

Panelists looked at the international response to the virus, best practices, and the manner in which the UN system should support national capacities, in line with the Economic and Social Council’s mandate to improve system-wide coordination and provide policy guidance.

“The UN system needs to re-task itself” to aid prevention against pandemic and support the needs of developing countries,” said David Nabarro, Senior UN System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza.

Speaking for the Food and Agricultural Organization, Assistant Director-General Louise Fresco said that the price tag for prevention at source, among animals, will reach \$425, but only \$30 million has been made available so far.

The World Health Organization Representative of the Director-General, Dr. David Heymann stressed the urgency of upgrading capacity for surveillance for disease in animals and humans; improving communication infrastructure, skills for the immediate and long-term, ramping up production capacity in antivirals and investment in vaccine research and development.

A central role for the UN system in prevention and providing support was endorsed by Governments, including the United States.

The Council consists of representatives of 54 UN Member States.

CONTACT:

UN Department of Public Information

Timothy Wall, Tel: (212) 963-5851, mediainfo@un.org