



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



Intervention of Marco Barbieri on behalf of UNEP/CMS at the Vienna Senior Officials Meeting on Avian and Human Pandemic Influenza (6-7 June 2006)

I would like to express our gratitude to the Government of Austria and the other organisers for having given us the opportunity to participate in this important meeting.

UNEP has been closely following the development of the situation concerning the spread and impacts of the Asian lineage HPAI H5NI, particularly since the possibility of a role of wildlife in the spread of the virus has been raised.

Within UNEP, a leading role in relation to the role of migratory wild birds in the spread of the virus has been taken by the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and by its daughter Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA).

In August 2005, CMS established an inter-agency Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds, which presently counts among its members, besides CMS and AEWA, Secretariats of other relevant multilateral agreements such as CBD and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, relevant non-governmental organisations such as Wetlands International, Birdlife International Wildlife Conservation Society and the International Council of Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), and scientific institutions such as the Zoological Society of London. FAO, OIE, WHO and UNEP participate in the task force as observers.

Our position concerning the role of wild birds in the spread of HPAI H5NI is that available evidence indeed indicates a role of wild migratory birds in the long-distance spread of the virus.

At the same time, we would like to point out that a lot of uncertainties and unknowns still exist concerning the relative role played by migratory birds with respect to other known mechanisms, such as trade in poultry and their products, legal and illegal trade in caged birds, and movement of humans.

This was confirmed by two recent major expert meetings:

International Scientific Seminar on Avian Influenza, the Environment and Migratory Birds (Nairobi, 10-11 April 2006) organised by the UNEP – Division on Early Warning and Assessment, UNEP-CMS and UNEP-AEWA. The Conclusion and Recommendation of the meeting are available from the CMS website at http://www.cms.int/avianflu/conclusions_rec_ai_seminar.pdf.

International Scientific Seminar on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds, organised by FOA and OIE in Rome last week.

In this regard, we would like to express our strong support to research and surveillance programmes aimed at clarifying the role of migratory birds in the spread of the virus, and the related mechanisms. We would like to mention in particular two initiatives at the global and regional level:

Global Avian Influenza Network for Surveillance (GAINS)

Network for Early Warning of Influenza Viruses in Migratory Birds in Europe (NEW-FLUBIRD)

At the same time, as a complement to reports from yesterday, we would like to point out that evidence at the moment seems to point mainly towards the poultry trade as the main mechanism for the spread of H5NI. Although no certainty can be expressed on that, this seems indeed to be the case for the spread of H5NI in Africa, as was largely confirmed by the meetings mentioned above. In this regard, a compilation of available information on trade in poultry and poultry products appears essential to an understanding of the pattern of spread of the virus.

A final, more general remark to conclude. We believe that the degradation of the health of ecosystems, and especially the decline in extent and condition of wetlands, have had, and are having, a role in the evolution and spread of HPAI H5NI, as well as of other zoonoses. We are aware that this environmental dimension does not constitute an immediate priority, or even a medium term one. We believe on the other hand that, in a longer term perspective, this aspect will have to be addressed, if we want at least to reduce the risk of further diseases to appear in the future.

Thank you for your attention.