In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

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to the
SECOND AVIAN AND PANDEMIC INFLUENZA TRAINING WORKSHOP
GCC CENTRE FOR INFECTION CONTROL AND SAUDI SOCIETY FOR PUBLIC
HEALTH IN COLLABORATION WITH WHO, NAMRU-3 AND CDC
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 5–9 January 2008

Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the second avian and pandemic influenza training workshop. I would like to express my great appreciation to the Saudi Arabian National Guard Health Affairs, King Abdulaziz Medical City for organizing and hosting this important workshop. The involvement of the World Health Organization and its collaborating centres demonstrates our commitment to supporting this endeavour. WHO’s strategy on pandemic influenza preparedness and response underscores the importance of transparency and information sharing. It focuses on strengthening capacity in the Regional Office and Member States to respond in a timely manner to outbreaks of H5N1 infection among humans.

Dear colleagues,

The emergence and wide spread of the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of avian influenza viruses, its adaptability and continuous mutation has generated unprecedented global response in anticipation of a potential influenza pandemic. The virus has crossed the species barrier and humans have been infected. The recent outbreaks of influenza A (H5N1) among poultry and humans have moved the world closer to a pandemic than at any time since 1968. Nevertheless, a
very different strain of influenza virus could yet be responsible for the anticipated pandemic of human influenza.

Eleven out of the 22 countries in our Region have been affected by the virus so far. Human cases were reported from Iraq, Egypt Djibouti and Pakistan. Egypt has witnessed the largest cluster of human cases outside south-east Asia, with five new cases occurring during the last week of December 2007, and avian influenza has recently appeared among poultry in Saudi Arabia. The occurrence of outbreaks of avian influenza in the Region clearly indicates that it could be severely hit by a human influenza pandemic.

The main goal of this important GCC training activity is to provide adequate, appropriate and timely technical support to enable member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council to respond efficiently to emerging outbreaks of avian influenza through adequately skilled public health professionals. This training activity is expected to improve national preparedness plans and strengthen coordination and collaboration among different national, regional and international stakeholders.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank you all again, and ask all of you to seek the utmost benefit from this workshop through sound discussions, exchange of ideas and clear planning, to enhance the surveillance and preparedness activities to combat avian influenza and improve preparedness for human pandemic influenza in our region. I wish you all a successful workshop and a pleasant stay in Riyadh.