



**UN SYSTEM INFLUENZA COORDINATION (UNSCIC)  
QUARTERLY UPDATE  
With input from the Pandemic Influenza Contingency (PIC) Team  
1<sup>st</sup> January - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008**

**INTRODUCTION**

During the first quarter of 2008, recurring outbreaks of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N1 virus in poultry and/or wild birds have been reported in China, India, Iran, Israel, Lao PDR, Germany, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and Vietnam. Authorities in the Republic of Korea are currently reporting a series of severe outbreaks and are involved in a cull of several million poultry. The virus continues to circulate, and is considered to be entrenched within poultry populations, in Indonesia and Egypt. Reports suggest that the virus is also now entrenched in poultry within Bangladesh. There have been no new reports of H5N1 outbreaks in Nigeria for some weeks.

There has been an upsurge in reports of outbreaks and in numbers of human cases during this trimester – as expected. Instances of human infection with H5N1 were confirmed in Indonesia, where the number and case fatality rate are comparatively high (15 cases of infection, of which 12 were fatal). There have also been case reports from Vietnam (5 cases, 5 fatal), Egypt (4 cases, 1 fatal) and China (3 cases, 3 fatal). However, there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus, and the World Health Organization (WHO) pandemic alert remains at phase 3.

The main focus of the Coordinator's work during this period has been to sustain the momentum for effective support to countries as they seek to control outbreaks of HPAI, to prevent the virus from becoming entrenched, and to reduce the circulating viral load in settings where it is entrenched. The Coordinator and team, in close cooperation with UN systems agencies and the World Bank, have sought to ensure effective follow-up to the conclusions of the New Delhi International Conference (December 2007) which will lead to the next intergovernmental conference scheduled to take place in Egypt in October 2008.

The Coordinator continues to be concerned about the situation of HPAI in poultry (and sporadic human cases) within Indonesia (see below): he is also concerned about continuing reports of cases in poultry and humans in Vietnam given the enormous effort that has gone in to mass poultry vaccination. [Ducks are believed to be an important contributor to the epidemiology and continued transmission of H5N1 in Vietnam]. A new source of concern is the intensity of HPAI infection in poultry within the Ganges delta (in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India) as the "stamping out" strategy has proved hard to implement, especially in Bangladesh. Fortunately there have been no confirmed human cases from this geographical region so far.

The emphasis on pandemic preparedness has been sustained: WHO and the Pandemic Influenza Contingency (PIC) Team have focused on the revision of pandemic preparedness strategies, the PIC team has worked for pandemic preparedness among humanitarian agencies, and there has been an increased intensity of work with UN-system country-based groups on operational continuity planning through simulation exercises.

## 1. **UNSIC's involvement in coordination of Interagency Action**

In early March, UNSIC convened a small *strategic inter-agency meeting* in Geneva to provide an opportunity for its partners to shape the strategies and priorities that the UN System Influenza Coordinator will pursue during the rest of 2008. UNSIC, the PIC Team and some close partners from within and outside of the UN System reviewed current challenges in the control of HPAI and pandemic preparedness and ways in which UNSIC could provide targeted assistance (in offering support to UN country teams, regional bodies and other international organizations). Participants agreed on the value of another Progress Report and Review of the UN Consolidated Action Plan on Avian and Human Influenza (AHI), and highlighted the importance of continuously working closely with intergovernmental partners, alongside the specialized agencies, to encourage sustained global momentum. Information sharing, in particular with partners on the country-level, was identified as an area that needed more attention. They also exchanged viewpoints on the requested follow-up to the New Delhi International Conference to prepare medium- to long-term strategies moving towards “One World One Health” and develop options for their implementation. Participants came to the conclusion that, with regard to the medium- to long-term, it will be important to maintain the political momentum for joint avian influenza and pandemic preparedness efforts, while certain aspects of the response are becoming technically more separate.

The specialized agencies FAO, OIE, WHO and UNICEF are now in the process of defining longer-term strategies that, while building upon the AHI experience, will go beyond this and will contribute to lowering the risks posed by a range of infections likely to emerge at the interface between animals and humans during the next few decades. The World Bank is looking into options for implementation and financing of such strategies. A consultation with a larger group is planned to be held in June, and final outcomes of the work will be presented in advance of the next International Ministerial Conference scheduled to take place in Egypt in October 2008.

The *Technical Working Group (TWG) on Influenza*<sup>1</sup> met on 13 February 2008, and the *Deputy Secretary-General's Steering Committee on Influenza*<sup>2</sup> met on 13 March 2008. Topics reviewed included the outcomes of the New Delhi International Ministerial Conference and their implications for the UN system and its partners, as well as influenza pandemic preparedness in the UN. The Steering Committee welcomed the initiatives on the medium- to long-term strategy development and emphasized the ideal of different agencies and bodies taking this forward in synergy. The Committee took stock of progress being made in pandemic preparedness, based on a PIC report summarizing the status of UN Country Team (UNCT) efforts in each geographical region and distinct areas of pandemic contingency planning. The Committee highlighted the need to clarify how the efforts undertaken by different UN entities for different aspects of contingency planning link and complement each other.

The *Management Committee for the UN Central Fund for Influenza Action (CFIA MC)* held its sixth meeting on 20 February 2008<sup>3</sup> to review and make funding decisions on eleven project proposals submitted for CFIA funding. Further to additional contributions made by Norway at the end of 2007, the CFIA also received funding from USAID, in the amount of \$35 million over three years (as previously reported). Following challenges in the finalization of USAID's grant

<sup>1</sup> The Note for the Record (NFR) of this TWG meeting is available under <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=590>

<sup>2</sup> The NFR and background documents of this Steering Committee meeting are available under <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=606>

<sup>3</sup> The NFR of this CFIA MC meeting is available under [http://www.undp.org/mdtf/influenza/docs/NFR\\_20Feb08.doc](http://www.undp.org/mdtf/influenza/docs/NFR_20Feb08.doc)

agreement, the remaining issues were solved under a special arrangement with the Multi-Donor Trust Fund Office. For the first time, donor representatives attended the CFIA MC meeting. The Administrative Agent of the CFIA presented the 1<sup>st</sup> CFIA Funding Framework which shows contributions, allocations, deposits, and balance of funds available. The CFIA MC reviewed and approved all of the 11 proposals submitted for a total amount of \$12.95 million and one budget reallocation. Recipient organizations include ICAO, ILO, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOCHA, and WFP, with four of these applying for additional tranches.

### ***Support to Coordination at Country and Regional Level***

The UN System Influenza Coordinator, accompanied by the Head of UNSIC's Asia and Pacific Regional Hub (APRH), traveled to Indonesia from 29 January – 1 February to work with representatives of WHO, FAO and UNICEF, colleagues from the UNCT, donor representatives as well as Ministers and other government officials. The HPAI situation in Indonesia is still worrisome – with the H5N1 virus considered entrenched in many parts of the country. The Coordinator reviewed the challenges in the control, and identified priorities for the response, including a more decentralized approach, which would involve strong communication and social mobilization strategies focusing on reaching the community-level. With regard to external support, the importance of a consolidated in-country UN programme and improved donor coordination was highlighted.

On 19-20 March the UNSIC APRH organized a regional UN System Workshop on Avian and Pandemic Influenza, chaired by the UN System Influenza Coordinator. As the sixth workshop since 2005, this event focused on longer term approaches to better animal health and reduced risks of human impact of animal diseases, on pandemic preparedness, coordination and global trends. The Bangkok workshop gathered together over one hundred participants from 17 UNCTs in the Asia-Pacific Region, as well as from regional UN offices, UN headquarters, and members of the UNSIC New York and PIC Geneva Teams. A session on partnerships between the UN and other stakeholders was also attended by regional donors and INGOs. In a separate meeting, in-country AHI Coordinators and Focal Points shared experiences of their work and discussed ways for further collaboration, including through the UNSIC APRH.

Throughout January to March, the APRH held discussions with visiting missions and regional stakeholders. In mid-February the APRH team and the regional inter-agency team held a half day planning meeting to identify priorities for 2008. Members of the APRH engaged in various regional and sub-regional inter-governmental initiatives, and participated in meetings such as the MBDS Coordinating Committee Meeting in Chiang Mai (Thailand, 2-4 February) where the group deliberated on the six year workplan, as well as in the ASEAN HPAI Eradication Workshop (Bali, 13-15 February) where the APRH presented an UN AHI activity update. The Head of the APRH visited Cambodia in mid-February to meet with the UNCT. In March, she spoke to the regional health leads of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) at the IFRC Annual Regional Health Team meeting and gave a key note at the ILO 'AHI and the Workplace Project' consultation meeting. She also spoke on progress on API preparedness, discussing the role of communication and the UN Information Service, at the Department of Public Information (DPI) Asia-Pacific Strategic Communication Workshop.

## 2. **Global Readiness to mitigate the societal impact of the next Influenza Pandemic**

Following the decision taken in the 16 November meeting of the Deputy Secretary-General's Steering Committee on Influenza, the Pandemic Influenza Contingency (PIC) Team has now been incorporated into the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as a special project. The PIC Team will however remain closely related to UNSIC.

### ***Humanitarian pandemic preparedness***

Following up on the commitments made at the high-level meeting of NGOs, Red Cross and UN humanitarian agencies on 29 October 2007 at IFRC Headquarters in Geneva, PIC, USAID and IFRC took part in a joint mission in Ethiopia. This was the second of several planned missions aimed at helping governments in priority countries to get ready to respond to the humanitarian consequences of an influenza pandemic on vulnerable populations. The follow-up group established at the high-level meeting is also organising a tabletop exercise in Geneva on 19 June to help clarify the roles and responsibilities of different parts of the UN system to tackle humanitarian needs during a pandemic. The exercise will refer to and test the Concept of Operations for the UN System in a pandemic (known as the CONOPS). This will be followed up by a high level inter-agency table top exercise involving the Red Cross Movement, key NGOs and the UN system on 26 September in Geneva.

### ***Pandemic Contingency Planning***

In November 2007, PIC was invited to chair an international taskforce which will prepare new **WHO guidelines** on how governments should prepare sectors other than health to continue delivering essential services during a pandemic. As chair of the 'Task Force 5' group, PIC produced a draft of the chapter which was reviewed at the WHO meeting in Lyon, France on 5-7 March.

During the first quarter of 2008, PIC further advanced its **online guidance and assessment tool** ([www.un-pic.org/web](http://www.un-pic.org/web)) and conducted systematic analyses of national pandemic plans in partnership with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The **Europe and Central Asia** Regional Planning Officer (RPO) attended a two-day regional retreat held in Dubai in January which was organized by the OCHA Regional Office for the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia (ROMENACA). The retreat focused on regional aspects of emergency planning, coordination and response. The RPO also facilitated a functional simulation in Serbia and a tabletop simulation in Turkey in February.

The PIC **West Africa** regional office is currently involved, upon request from the Civil Protection Department of Mali, in the organization of a full scale regional civil-military simulation exercise to be conducted in Mali. In January, the West Africa regional office selected Cap Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Senegal as priority countries for support in 2008, with a focus on supporting the inclusion of pandemic influenza preparedness in their IASC contingency plans as well as in their governments' Natural Disaster Management plans.

In *Southern Africa*, the regional office met three times in February-March with the South Africa National Disaster Management Centre in Pretoria and Johannesburg, to highlight the importance of integrating pandemic preparedness in different sectors and harmonizing efforts. In addition, the RPO participated in a Regional Workshop and Table Top Exercise on Pandemic Preparedness organized by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in Johannesburg in March, during which it was agreed that airlines should develop their own internal Emergency Response Plans.

In January, the PIC *Middle East and North Africa* regional office participated in a Senior Management Team meeting with David Veness, UN Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security, to discuss security measures following the 2007 Algiers bombing as well as synergies that could be established with relevant aspects of pandemic preparedness planning.

In February, the *Asia and Pacific* PIC RPO and the a member of the UNSIC APRH participated in the Workshop on Cross-Border Exercise Management organized by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) to help strengthen the capacity of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam to manage influenza outbreaks in humans in international border provinces. UNSIC APRH presented on different types of pandemic simulation exercises which have taken place so far in the Asia Pacific region. Members of the regional office also participated in the ASEAN+3 Emerging Infectious Diseases Programme Half-Year Review and Planning Workshop for Year 2 Projects as well as in the ASEAN Regional Planning Meeting on Strengthening Multi-sectoral Pandemic Preparedness and Response (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 27-28 March). In addition, the PIC RPO facilitated tabletop simulation exercises for the UNCTs in China (January) and Indonesia (March). He also attended meetings in Vietnam with the UNCT, World Bank and the Government. A member of UNSIC's APRH participated as an evaluator in the 'PanStop II', a simulation exercise on rapid containment operations, in Manila, the Philippines, on 5-6 March.

The PIC *Latin America and Caribbean* regional office conducted a support mission to Costa Rica where it met with UNCT focal points, the UN Emergency Team (UNETE), directors of UN agencies in the country, IICA (Instituto Interamericano de Cooperacion para la Agricultura), the National Red Cross, CNE (National commission for Emergencies), and others. The RPO facilitated UNCT simulation exercises in Honduras in February and in Nicaragua in March, and also attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> Interagency Meeting on Strategic Communication for Avian/Pandemic Influenza held in Washington in February.

### **3. Tracking and reporting on progress**

UNSIIC, together with the World Bank and in collaboration with the specialized UN system agencies and partners, has started to work on the preparation of the next *UN-World Bank Global Progress Report on Responses to Avian Influenza and State of Pandemic Readiness*, to be made available in time to be considered by delegations well in advance of the next International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza to take place in Egypt in October 2008. Similar to previous reports, it will provide a compilation and analysis of assistance for avian influenza responses and pandemic influenza preparedness that has been pledged, committed and disbursed between January 2006 and June 2008. The aim is to also provide information on the indication of the purposes for which this assistance is being used. It will also contain assessments of the global situation for the (i) prevention and control of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in animals; (ii) the detection of, and response to, a human influenza pandemic; (iii) the status of operational preparedness to minimize the social, economic and humanitarian impact of

an influenza pandemic; and (vi) the mobilization of societies for both responses to avian influenza and pandemic preparedness. As a special feature the report will include an analysis of arrangements for the implementation of financial and technical support for the control of HPAI and pandemic preparedness - at country, regional and global levels – that is currently being done by UNSIC and the World Bank.

#### **4. Coordination of Communication**

The *UN Communications Group's Task Force on Avian and Human Influenza* is moving ahead with the utilization of the Emergency Notification Service (ENS) alert system for the rapid exchange of agency-approved messages and talking points between agency focal points during the course of an influenza pandemic or other global emergencies. UNSIC is providing first year funding, and agencies have been asked to sign a Memorandum of Agreement and provide precise contact details to give way to its utilization. A test run of the system is planned for the spring. In addition, the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) is likely to fund the start-up costs for the set-up of a SharePoint website for secure communication collaboration.

With DPI funding, some material of the UN Influenza Portal (<http://www.un-influenza.org/>) is currently being translated into all official UN languages.

#### **5. UNSIC Evaluation**

An external evaluation has been commissioned to assess the effectiveness of UNSIC in fulfilling its objectives of coordinating UN system influenza action as described in the Coordinator's TORs. It will also analyse whether the assumptions underpinning the creation of the Coordinator's position remain valid and will seek to look forward and recommend future priorities for the Coordinator and team. It will assess the impact and relevance of UNSIC's products for the achievement of its objectives and analyse the efficiency with which financial resources have been used. The evaluators are also being asked to consider whether the "UNSIC approach" could be usefully applied to other multi-sectoral issues that are addressed by several different UN system and partner agencies. Mr. Barnaby Willitts-King, based in Kathmandu, has been identified as evaluation team leader (joined by Angela Smith and Les Sims): the exercise starts mid-April.

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