

Welcoming address

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Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the President of the OIE and its Member Countries, I welcome you to this conference. It is a great honour for me to be here with you. I will start by reminding you of the historic objectives of the OIE:

- to provide transparency in relation to information surrounding animal diseases worldwide
- to collect and disseminate scientific information useful to the control and eradication of animal diseases and zoonoses around the world, and
- to help developing countries to help themselves in the organisation of their control and eradication programmes.

This conference is perfectly suited to these tasks.

Another objective of the OIE is to provide guidelines and standards to guarantee safety of international trade of animals and animal products. To achieve these objectives, the OIE needs to develop and create skills and resources within the Veterinary Services of its Member Countries and within the 156 Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres worldwide. The OIE is also involved in new fields and activities, mainly food safety and animal welfare.

The main outputs of the OIE are the standards, which are recognised by the WTO. These standards are encompassed in the Terrestrial and Aquatic Codes and the Manuals of diagnostic tests and vaccines. All OIE standards have to be based on solid scientific information and knowledge; these standards must be considered in any risk analysis that may be conducted by an importing country.

This conference will be an important tool to the OIE as it will use your outputs to develop, where necessary, new standards for the chapters on bluetongue. Historically, discussions by the international community on bluetongue have been very conflictual not only because of some commercial issues, but also because the scientific community was not able to adopt a united position in the past. I hope that at this conference you will be able to adopt a more common approach to help the OIE update the chapters on this very important topic, not only to avoid the importation of pathogens and diseases but, also, to prevent the creation of unjustified sanitary barriers. This conference is a unique opportunity for improving the world Codes. I am certain you will do better than the Cancun negotiators of the WHO.

I would like to thank the Italian Government again and in particular Dr Marabelli, past President of the OIE. I thank also the European Commission, Vincenzo Caporale, the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale 'G. Caporale' in Teramo and the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale 'A. Mirri' in Sicily, and, also, all members of the executive committee of this conference, with special reference to Jim Pearson. I thank too the scientific committee, the staff of the two aforementioned institutes, and all the speakers who accepted invitations to make presentations. Finally, I thank all the participants.

In the proceedings I have noticed that vaccines will be discussed. I take the opportunity to remind you that a similar OIE conference will be held in Argentina in April 2004 concerning vaccination policies, mainly on FMD, influenza and swine fever. I hope your deliberations here in Taormina are useful.

Thank you