



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



13th INTER-AMERICAN MEETING, AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL, ON HEALTH AND AGRICULTURE

Washington, D.C., 24–25 April 2003

Provisional Agenda Item 10.3

RIMSA13/13 (Eng.)
31 March 2003
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

THE EXPANDING MANDATE OF THE INTERNATIONAL OFFICE OF EPIZOOTICS (OIE)*

**Bernard Vallat
Director-General of the OIE**

* The International Office of Epizootics has recently changed its name and will henceforth be known as World Animal Health Organization retaining the acronym OIE.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction.....	3
Sanitary Information	3
Scientific Information	3
Sanitary Protection of the World Trade in Animals and Animal Products	4
International Assistance	5
Relations between the OIE and Veterinary Services in Member Countries.....	6
Organization of the OIE	7
Relations with International Organizations	9
Other OIE Activities	10
Conclusions.....	11

Introduction

1. The World Animal Health Organization (OIE) (formerly, the International Office of Epizootics) was created in 1924 by 28 founding countries at a meeting in Paris. Predating the United Nations, the OIE has always been independent of the United Nations.
2. The OIE currently has 164 member countries. The only countries in the Americas that have still not applied for membership are a handful of Caribbean island nations.
3. The OIE is the only international organization devoted exclusively to the control of animal diseases, including diseases transmissible to humans. Its main task is to furnish the international community with the necessary tools for controlling and, where possible, eradicating animal diseases and zoonoses. To accomplish this, the OIE fosters an ongoing dialogue among its member countries, fueled by scientific and epidemiological databases established by its various facilities, which provide the following types of information.

Sanitary Information

4. Each member country agrees to report all animal diseases within its borders to the OIE. The OIE then conveys this information to all member countries to enable them to institute protective measures.
5. The OIE publishes only official information authenticated by government authorities. However, it actively seeks out unofficial information and, where necessary, will question the national authorities directly to confirm or quash any rumors. This system has enabled it to made great strides in improving transparency with respect to the world animal health situation.
6. One of the historical missions of the OIE, which was largely responsible for its creation, is the publication of real-time information on the status of animal diseases and zoonoses around the world. The OIE and the heads of veterinary services in its member countries are constantly seeking to ensure the reliability of the data reported to the international community, which is a major responsibility. In fact, any failure on their part could have catastrophic effects, both within OIE member countries and in other parts of the world.

Scientific Information

7. A world-wide network of 156 reference laboratories and Collaborating Centers furnishes the OIE with the necessary expertise for the collection, analysis, and

dissemination of the scientific information necessary for developing disease control methods and setting international standards grounded in objective science.

8. This network covers all topics relevant for disease control and furnishes needed expertise on each of the 69 animal diseases and zoonoses of special interest to the international community. It is made up of top international experts in this field.

9. Collaborating Centers, reference laboratories and the corresponding experts are accredited as such through special procedures designed to vest them with the required degree of international legitimacy.

10. Candidates for participation in the OIE network are nominated by the governments of member countries and evaluated by an international committee of experts appointed by the General Assembly. The General Assembly then votes on whether to accept such scientific establishments as members of the world-wide network.

11. The list of diseases addressed by the OIE is constantly changing. Its current focus is on emerging diseases or pathogens liable to be used directly by man for criminal purposes.

12. An effort is currently under way to update procedures for the reporting of diseases and epidemiological events by member countries. The end result will be the establishment of two lists of notifiable diseases: one for land animals and the other for aquatic animals.

13. A series of highly specific general scientific criteria are being developed to distinguish between immediately notifiable diseases and epidemiological events and those with delayed-reporting requirements within each the two lists of notifiable diseases.

Sanitary Protection of the World Trade in Animals and Animal Products

14. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the SPS Agreement) recognizes OIE standards, guidelines, and recommendations as official international references for ensuring the safety of the international trade in animals and animal products from a health protection standpoint.

15. The OIE sets standards for all domesticated animal species, including aquatic animals, to help member countries establish regulatory measures to prevent the importation of pathogens liable to affect their health status. The application of these standards also helps to keep countries from instituting overly strict measures that operate as *de facto* trade barriers disguised as sanitary protection measures.

16. OIE standards are published in the form of codes containing general rules (definitions, general principles) and specific provisions (descriptions of steps to be taken against each OIE-listed animal disease and zoonosis). The laboratory methods used in the detection or confirmation of animal diseases and zoonoses and quality requirements for animal vaccines are also addressed in various specific OIE standards.

International Assistance

17. Working with the FAO, the OIE analyzes data on the enormous economic and social damage inflicted as a result of the injurious effects of animal diseases, particularly in rural areas.

18. It is endeavoring to convince policymakers in government and relevant international organizations of the inadequacy of the public expenditure allocated for the control of animal diseases, including diseases transmissible to humans. The enormous cost of the recent global crises created by bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or mad cow disease) and foot-and-mouth disease attests to the advisability of investing in disease prevention to avoid the steep cost of having to put out fires all over the world.

19. The OIE has the evidence to show that modest sums spent on animal disease control programs yield large economic and social returns by impacting directly on poverty-reduction efforts, on public health (by reducing the impact of zoonoses and food-borne diseases) and on access by poor countries to regional and international markets for animals and animal products.

20. Concerning this latter point, the OIE joined the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the WTO in signing a joint declaration at the last WTO ministerial conference in Doha (Qatar). The declaration represents a commitment on the part of these organizations to get developing countries more involved in negotiations leading to the framing and adoption of international sanitary standards and to make an effort to assist poor countries in building the necessary capacity to enforce such standards. The goal is to ensure that the anticipated economic benefits from WTO Agreements are more evenly distributed among all nations and that developing countries or countries in transition do not continue to be penalized by problems stemming from the complexity of the SPS Agreements which, in many cases, are limiting their export capacity.

21. One of the first concrete steps taken in the wake of the Declaration of Doha was the establishment of a new mechanism known as the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), administered by the five signatory organizations, with the WTO serving as its Secretariat.

22. This facility has already been funded by the World Bank. Participation is open to any donor who would like to help developing countries and countries in transition better share in the benefits engendered by the SPS Agreements, specifically by helping public authorities to form better-organized partnerships with the public sector to work together to lift sanitary barriers to exports.

Relations between the OIE and Veterinary Services in Member Countries

23. As summarized above, the four basic objectives of the OIE have at least one thing in common: they can be attained only if OIE member countries are equipped with competent, well-organized, reputable veterinary services, with adequate human and financial resources.

24. Public veterinary services must also rely on a network of private veterinarians and on effective, well-organized livestock and manufacturers' associations. OIE member countries already have established standards in OIE codes, setting minimum organizational requirements to ensure that the certifications issued by public authorities attesting to the compliance of exports of animals or animal products with sanitary regulations are considered credible by the corresponding importing countries.

25. Thus, veterinary services play an important role in this process, as does the veterinary profession as a whole. This is why, with the consent of the Director of PAHO, we have decided to celebrate World Veterinary Day during the course of this meeting, which falls on 26 April of this year.

26. Our main message is the need to modernize and motivate veterinary services to step up their efforts to achieve safe, high-quality animal products. In fact, the whole world would agree that the success of efforts to ensure food safety and health lies in developing effective policies and control procedures for all stages in this process, from the animal production phase to the distribution of end products to consumers.

27. It is up to today's veterinary services to expand this new approach and to governments and international organizations to support them in this endeavor, wherever necessary.

28. I am also pleased with the results of ongoing discussions with the World Bank, which is involved in the STDF I spoke about earlier and which now regards official veterinary services as a « global public good » -- in other words, as eligible for public subsidies without requiring a financial return equivalent to or greater than the amount of the domestic or international public subsidy approved.

29. Our society expects a great deal from its veterinary services, and they should not disappoint it.

Organization of the OIE

30. Decisions about OIE policies are made democratically by the General Assembly of representatives of the governments of its 164 member countries through the adoption of resolutions. Considering the highly specialized nature of its discussions and the types of topics dealt with by this body, all member country representatives are heads of national veterinary services. Each member country has a single vote, regardless of its size.

31. Other resolutions voted on by the General Assembly have to do with the adoption or updating of international standards and official recognition of the health status of member countries with respect to foot-and-mouth disease, rinderpest, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, and bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

32. Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly are implemented by the Central Bureau headquartered in Paris. The Director-General is elected directly by the General Assembly to a five-year term.

33. The OIE carries out its mandate with a mere 50 full-time staff members. The scientific and technical data processed by the organization for health reporting and the development of international standards are furnished by its world-wide network of veterinary services, reference laboratories, and panels of experts volunteering their services. The OIE is also highly dependent on Specialist Commissions and working groups appointed by the General Assembly to frame international standards, which are submitted to annual meetings of the General Assembly with a view to their adoption by the organization.

34. With its size, flexibility, and innovative procedures, the current cycle for the formulation or revision of OIE international standards takes only one or two years to complete.

35. The members of OIE Specialist Commissions volunteer their services, as do the 156 OIE reference laboratories and collaborating centers.

36. The financial and technical management of the OIE by its Central Bureau is overseen by an Administrative Commission composed of delegates from nine member countries spanning all five continents. The Chairman of the Administrative Commission also serves as the President of the OIE.

37. This inventive organizational structure allows the OIE to function with comparatively small mandatory financial contributions. Each member country voluntarily selects one of what are currently six contribution categories. OIE contributions range from approximately US\$ 12,000 to somewhere around \$100,000, depending on the contribution category in question. Nations appearing on the United Nations list of least developed countries, which is updated yearly, are required to pay only half these amounts. (In practice, they pay only \$6,000 a year or thereabouts, since they are all in the lowest contribution category.) Under the current system, the organization is actually able to collect approximately 90% of the value of annual contributions.

38. The OIE also conducts **regional programs** tailored to the unique situation and needs of each major world region. It currently has five permanent field offices in Tokyo, Bamako, Beirut, Sofia, and Buenos Aires, its regional office for the Americas.

39. To a large extent, these permanent field offices owe their existence to the generosity of their host countries, which provide them with office space and help defray their operating costs through voluntary subsidies, over and above their mandatory contributions.

40. OIE regional policies are set by five regional commissions composed of delegates from all member countries in each region, which designate a regional office and elect a Chairman.

41. These commissions meet every two years. They vote on recommendations to be submitted to the OIE General Assembly. All such recommendations must be approved by the General Assembly prior to their implementation by the Central Bureau to ensure the harmonization of OIE global policy.

42. The OIE's permanent representatives in each region work in close cooperation with its regional commissions and, more specifically, with their elected chairman. Their main task is to help member countries within their region to develop common positions, particularly for purposes of adopting new standards at annual meetings of the General Assembly. They also organize regional seminars and workshops to build decision-making capacity in member countries, harmonize domestic legislation, and promote the regional and international trade in animals and animal products.

43. Time and again, the OIE member countries have found that the work performed by the Regional Commission for the Americas with the assistance of its regional office has enabled the Region to effectively weigh in and make certain its voice is heard at meetings of experts, Specialist Commissions or the OIE General Assembly, particularly in the course of discussions or with respect to the adoption of new international standards.

44. The OIE Regional Office for the Americas also plays a particularly important role in exploring opportunities for operational cooperation with other regional organizations on matters such as the prevention of BSE, the control of foot-and-mouth disease, and methodological assistance for official veterinary services in member countries.

Relations with International Organizations

45. The OIE's success in carrying out its mandate lies in the creation of synergies with a variety of other international organizations. To this end, the OIE has entered into official agreements with 20 or so regional and international organizations, with a view to sharing relevant information, jointly tackling common problems, avoiding overlapping and duplication of efforts, and addressing all necessary technical areas.

46. OIE cooperation with the WTO and other bodies that set standards in health-related areas (Codex Alimentarius, IPPC) is vital. The OIE also sits on the WTO SPS Committee and is involved in administering the new STDF.

47. The OIE recommends appropriate experts to the WTO for settling disputes between member countries. Moreover, the OIE Director-General can lighten the WTO's workload by providing direct mediation services for settling disputes between member countries at the request of the countries in question, particularly in cases where the countries in question wish to avoid being tied up in lengthy, cumbersome WTO dispute settlement proceedings.

48. Its relations with Codex Alimentarius (Codex) are equally important. This organization, whose Secretariat is jointly operated by the FAO and WHO, is also recognized by the WTO as a standard-setting body in matters related to the sanitary quality of food. Since the sanitary quality of food may be compromised by the presence of animal diseases or pathogens in the animal production phase, there was always a risk that the OIE and Codex would develop different, if not conflicting, standards or would simply « pass the buck » back and forth in certain areas in which there were no established standards.

49. These problems are being addressed by the recent establishment of a formal cooperative arrangement between Codex and the OIE. Incidentally, I would like to thank the current Chairman of the Codex Commission, Mr. Thomas Billy, for a job well done.

50. This cooperative arrangement by the two organizations has prompted the formation of a permanent OIE working group to address the problem of potential consumer risks associated with the production of animals and animal products with the assistance of top Codex officials. This working group will recommend appropriate new

standards to the OIE and Codex, for example, addressing on-farm risks posed by *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, *E. coli* 157, cysticercosis, antibiotic use, etc.

51. The OIE has entered into agreements with a number of specialized financial institutions such as the World Bank in its quest to promote international support and assistance for efforts by public authorities to control animal diseases and zoonoses.

52. Moreover, official agreements have been in place between the OIE and the FAO and WHO since the 1950's. These agreements are currently being updated with a view to creating synergies and, more specifically, to assisting member countries in their efforts to better control diseases and adjust to new international standards, while respecting the mandates of each organization.

53. The OIE also has an official agreement with PAHO, and we are in the process of developing a joint plan of action for working together to improve animal health and public health conditions throughout the Americas, specifically by promoting complementarities between the missions of veterinary and public health services. We need to continue working with PAHO and our member countries in the Americas in areas such as the control of tuberculosis, brucellosis, rabies, and avian influenza, the prevention of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, and the eradication of foot-and-mouth disease.

54. The OIE also has official agreements with private organizations or, more specifically, with international associations of veterinary drug manufacturers and milk producers, the International Equestrian Federation, and the World Veterinary Association. Such agreements enable the OIE to confer with the private sector, particularly as part of the crafting of new international standards.

Other OIE Activities

55. In 2002, the General Assembly of member countries passed a new resolution calling for the OIE to serve as the lead international organization in the area of animal welfare. In fact, there is growing social pressure in countries around the world, as well as from the consumers of animal products, to establish new international rules designed to harmonize domestic legislation for the protection of animals. Government policymakers in the industrialized countries and a number of developing countries support this course of action.

56. Accordingly, the OIE has formed a permanent working group for the development of international standards in this area. Its main priorities at this point are shipping conditions for animals and the slaughtering methods used in slaughterhouses and as part of on-farm sanitary slaughtering procedures in the event of epizootics requiring the killing of diseased or suspect animals.

57. These standards will be developed entirely on scientific bases to avoid subjective or political considerations. Since animal welfare issues lie outside the current scope of the SPS Agreement, the standards adopted by OIE member countries in this respect will be useful in any bilateral negotiations that they may wish to engage in for purposes of protecting trade and meeting the demands of certain consumer groups.

Conclusions

58. The OIE must be responsive to the needs of its member countries at all times, regardless of the size of their economies or the region with which they are affiliated.

59. It must serve as an international reference for officially reporting to the world on the international animal health situation and providing duly documented, credible information on the sanitary status of member countries and regions.

60. The OIE must promote veterinary research in countries around the world to improve disease control and continuously update necessary international sanitary standards ensuring the safety of world trade in animals and animal products based on irrefutable scientific evidence. It must make certain that all countries get their fair share of the benefits stemming from its operations and ensure their democratic participation in its policy-making and decision-making processes.

61. Operations by the OIE and other organizations should be regularly discussed and monitored by member countries to best capitalize on the resources supplied by the international community.

62. The OIE has an enormous task ahead of it, with the ultimate goal being the eradication of the world's most deadly diseases. The successful eradication of rinderpest, which, nowadays is found in only one country, can serve as an incentive for tackling other high-priority diseases.

63. The OIE must also help to provide the entire international community with new tools for reducing poverty, producing safe food products, and building wealth by promoting balanced international trade that is free of health risks.

64. I appeal to all member countries and all relevant international organizations to assist us in this undertaking.