PRESS RELEASE

Indonesia, WHO and EU: Tackling Together the Threat Posed by Avian and Human Influenza

Representatives of the Government of Indonesia, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the European Union (EU) met in Jakarta today (9/2) to discuss progress for controlling Avian Influenza (AI).

At a seminar entitled “Preparing Indonesia for Influenza Pandemic”, Prof Dr Tjandra Yoga Aditama, Director General of Disease Control and Environmental Health of the Indonesian Ministry of Health, H.E. Julian Wilson, Ambassador/ Head of the Delegation of the European Union and Dr Stephan Jost, Acting WHO Representative in Indonesia, spoke of the country challenges, strategies and results to date in controlling Avian influenza.

H.E. Mr. Julian Wilson stated at the event: “The need to work together to tackle the threat posed by Avian and Human Influenza is self-evident. For our part, the EU is providing more than 70% of the funds to the global Avian and Human Influenza Facility and our solidarity with Indonesia is reflected in our support for the National Strategy to address AI prevention and control. Through a 13.5 million euro EU grant administered by WHO, the INSPAI programme has delivered substantial assistance to Indonesia, including infection control training for 100 AI referral hospitals, training on quality control programme for the AI laboratory network and the ongoing Health Food Market Pilot in 10 regions and backing for Indonesia’s home-grown expert research which may help the country - as well as the global community - detect any mutation of the virus as early as possible”.

Meanwhile, Dr Stephan Jost said: “Many of the activities over the last several years undertaken by the Government of Indonesia, led by the Ministry of Health, in response to avian influenza stood the country in good stead to meet the challenges of pandemic H1N1 2009 infection. WHO continues to provide support and technical assistance in responding to the challenges of both these influenza viruses, to protect the health of the Indonesian people”.

At the seminar, leading experts in their fields also shared their experience on what they have done in meeting the AI challenges. The event also provided the occasion for the EU to handover 22 ambulances for selected hospitals, critical equipment for treating AI patients to 7 hospitals and scholarships for 48 Indonesian students to participate in a Field Epidemiology Training Programme (FETP).

Contact

EU Delegation – Edhie Rahmat, Tioria Silalahi: (021) 2554 6200
WHO- Nursila Dewi: (021) 520 4349
BACKGROUND

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in poultry was first reported in Indonesia in August 2003 and now 31 out of 33 provinces had been considered as HPAI endemic. The first human fatality was reported in 2005 in Tangerang; and as of December 2008, there were 141 confirmed human cases reported with 115 fatalities, with an associated case fatality rate of 81.7%. This makes Indonesia in the first rank globally for number of confirmed human cases with the highest mortality rate.

Almost four years after the emergence of HPAI in poultry, the virus is still circulating and threatening human health. While there are varying theories in the scientific community, the risk factors associate with poultry to human transmission have not been definitively identified. In all scenarios, environmental contamination is thought to play a role in human infection.

Disease surveillance and control in Indonesia is an extremely complex task. Health and veterinary services and related infrastructure vary markedly across the country, giving rise to problems for effective surveillance and response in the 33 provinces. These complexities, in addition to the country's size, geographical diversity, population density and lack of veterinary infrastructure, make HPAI control significantly more challenging than in other countries.

In December 2005, the Government of Indonesia adopted a National Strategic Plan for Controlling Avian Influenza which was designed as an effective response to this problem. In this context, WHO has received 13.5 million euro grant from the EU for the project “Implementation of the National Strategic Plan for Avian Influenza (INSPAI)”. Its key objective is to address the country’s needs in relation to the control of Avian Influenza and to prepare for an Influenza Pandemic. Some progress has been made since 2008 but other challenges are emerged.

With the recent emergence of H1N1, Indonesia comes to a more challenging situation because of the biological possibility for H1N1 virus to mutate with the existing H5N1. If this should occur, a virus re-assortment could develop a more pathogenic influenza virus that can easily transmit from human to human. With the EU support, some Indonesian experts are doing some significant researches which may help the country as well as the global community to early detect any possible mutation.

Main Features of EU health programmes

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<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Objectives/Focuses</th>
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<td>&quot;Avian Influenza Surveillance and Control&quot;</td>
<td>To support the prevention and control of animal/birds flu that focusing on 1) Participatory disease surveillance / response (PDS/PDR); 2) Redesigning of culling compensation system; 3) Community based preventive vaccination of poultry; 4) Monitoring of impact of control strategy; 5) Restructuring of the poultry industry; and 6) Support to KomNas FBPI in donor coordination, (1 to 5 are supposed to be implemented by Ministry of Agriculture)</td>
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<td>€ 7.8 million EU contribution to the World Bank administered AHIF (Avian and Human Influenza Facility) This is complementary with the PHRD¹ grant for Technical Assistance</td>
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<td>&quot;Implementing the National Strategy Plan for Avian Influenza control and pandemic preparedness&quot;</td>
<td>To support the Gol efforts to implement the health related aspects of avian influenza prevention and control and pandemic preparedness nationwide, through 1) Strengthening case management in 44 referral hospitals; 2) Strengthen disease surveillance; 3) Promoting healthy food markets and risk communications; and 4) Conducting essential research</td>
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<td>€ 13.5 million EU contribution through World Health Organisation</td>
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<td>Regional programme for Emerging &amp; Re-emerging infectious diseases (on pipeline)</td>
<td>1) Reinforced of regional animal and human health capacity to cope with emerging and re-emerging disease 2) Capacity development of Veterinary Services to meet OIE² international quality standards, evaluations and follow-up actions 3) Development of regional diagnostic laboratory network (Participation to the set up of a Pasteur Institute laboratory in Lao -€ 4 mil.)</td>
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<td>€ 23 million EU contribution for South &amp; South East Asia</td>
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¹ PHRD= Japanese grant for Population, Health, and Rural Development
² OIE= International Agency for Animal Health.