The Director General
Ref.: MDM/BV/12032015

Letter to all OIE Delegates

Paris, 12 March 2015

Subject: World Health Day 2015

Dear Delegate

I am writing with respect to the annual World Health Day which will be celebrated on April 7, 2015 in line with the founding of the World Health Organization on April 7, 1948.

The theme of World Health Day this year was announced by the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Margaret Chan, in November 2014 on the margins of the second International Conference on Nutrition and the topic selected this year is “Food Safety”.

This subject is of course relevant within the scope of the work of the OIE and its Member Countries and serves to highlight the importance of the OIE’s collaboration with the Codex Alimentarius Commission in aligning science-based standards at the animal production level with those applied for the protection of public health.

Food safety, in the current reality of global supply chains and the increasing demand for animal protein, is both a challenge and a responsibility which is taken very seriously by the OIE on behalf of its Member Countries.

Its inclusion, for the first time, as a priority area of work under the OIE’s Third Strategic Plan (2001 – 2005) was truly timely as it recognised that “The OIE should be more active in the area of public health and consumer protection by offering its competence in the field of zoonoses and diseases transmissible to humans through food, whether or not animals are affected by such diseases. Such interventions should be carried out in consultation with the World Health Organization and the Codex Alimentarius and cover all factors that could be the source of zoonoses.”
However, beyond the standard setting work of the OIE supported by the Animal Production Food Safety Working Group and the network of Reference Centres whose work focusses on food safety, the World Health Day theme presents an important opportunity to demonstrate the critical role that Veterinary Services play at the national level in food safety and their relationship with national health services through veterinary public health activities including meat and animal origin food inspection. Because food safety is also a pre-requisite for appropriate nutrition, the associated important contributions of Veterinary Services to productivity and development can also be highlighted.

The World Health Day theme serves to recognize that food safety is in fact a continuum of risk management that requires integrated efforts not only on the part of international organizations but also on the part of nature users (hikers, hunters, and fishermen), producers, abattoirs, transporters, processors, retailers, food service industry and consumers.

I therefore urge you to use the opportunity that World Food Day provides to work, e.g. with your national OIE Focal Points on food safety, national representatives of WHO in your country and public health counterparts to highlight the important contribution made by Veterinary Services and the critical role that the management of animal health plays in your country to guarantee food safety.

Sincerely yours,

Bernard Vallat

Cc.: Dr Monique Eloit, Dr Brian Evans, Dr Catherine Bertrand-Ferrandis