

Opening Address by Dr B. Vallat for the 2nd Global Conference on Animal Welfare
“Putting the OIE Standards to Work”
(Intercontinental Pyramid Hotel, Cairo (Egypt) 20-22 October 2008)

Dr Saad Nassar, Representative of the Egyptian Government,

Dr Barry O’Neil, President of OIE International Committee and OIE Delegate of New Zealand,

Dr Andrea Gavinelli, Representative of the European Commission

Dr Ahmed Abd El-Tawab Samaha, National Delegate of Egypt to the OIE

Dr Robert S. Thwala, President of the OIE Regional Commission for Africa

Dr Hassan Aidaros,

Distinguished national OIE Delegates and Focal Points, Honourable participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 2nd OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare.

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency Mr Amin Abaza and to the Government of Egypt for their generosity in hosting this important conference, as well as to the OIE Delegate of Egypt, Prof. Dr Hamed Abdel Tawab Samaha and to Dr Hassan Aidaros.

Four years ago the OIE held the 1st OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare in Paris. This was the first step in a work programme that culminated in 2005 with the unanimous adoption of the first series of international animal welfare standards by OIE Members, which numbered 168 countries at that time.

Three years on, it is appropriate to review where we stand with regard to the implementation of these standards globally and also to highlight the importance that the OIE and the international community place on improving animal welfare in all countries and regions of the world. The increasing importance of animal welfare, both to developed and developing countries, is reflected in the fact that we are holding this Conference in this region, thanks to the invitation of the Egyptian Government.

The main theme of this 2nd OIE Global Conference on Animal Welfare, entitled “Putting the OIE Standards to Work”, is the worldwide implementation of the OIE animal welfare standards for the transport of livestock by land, sea and air, the slaughter of animals for human consumption and the killing of animals for disease control purposes.

In convening this conference the OIE wishes to support its Members, especially the in-transition and developing countries, to implement the OIE standards and thereby to improve animal welfare worldwide. The involvement of Veterinary Services and veterinarians is a key and fundamental tool for improving animal welfare. This Conference also aims to provide practical assistance to OIE Delegates and national Animal Welfare Focal Points under their authority to help them to implement the OIE animal welfare standards in their countries. We know that many countries started to develop a national legislation for the first time after our first Conference, but we also know that several others still lack appropriate legislative texts.

I am convinced that the veterinary profession and associated professions and partners have the knowledge, expertise and commitment to achieve the goals set for this conference. By working together we can raise the profile of animal welfare worldwide and encourage OIE Members, Veterinary Services, including veterinarians in the private sector, and their partners to take greater responsibility for animal welfare.

The relation between humans and animals is crucial and we need national, regional and global regulatory frameworks that address the relationship between humans and animals.

The main objective of the OIE and of all national Veterinary Services is to improve animal health worldwide. Animal health is a key component of animal welfare.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to remind you of my strong view that Veterinary Services should be considered as a ‘Global Public Good’ and should be given the rightful place they deserve and be provided with the necessary resources to enable them to deliver

to society the services expected of them. They play a front line role in the prevention and control of animal diseases including those transmissible to humans. As such, their contribution in public health, food security, food safety, alleviation of poverty and market access is becoming more and more visible. Today Veterinary Services and their partners should not only play a leading role in their traditional activities of disease control and surveillance but also work closely with the human health services in contributing to public health.

In the course of this conference, the role of Veterinary Services, as one of the key players in the implementation of the OIE animal welfare standards will no doubt be highlighted.

It is particularly important to achieve improvements in animal health and associated public health issues and in animal welfare in regions where there is an intimate association between humans and livestock.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The significant advancement in the animal welfare field globally cannot be achieved by the OIE alone. The OIE regards its relationship with its partners to be of primary importance. Our close association with the European Commission and other donors supporting the OIE through important contributions to the Animal Health and Welfare World Fund has enabled the OIE to initiate a new programme of Regional meetings on animal welfare. One significant outcome of these meetings has been the development of OIE Regional Animal Welfare Strategies, which are highlighting issues and approaches that are tailored to each OIE Region.

Collaborative partnerships are also reflected in the work of the OIE Animal Welfare Working Group. The group includes eight permanent members, representatives from a great consortium of non-governmental organisations, the agri-food industry and international producer associations.

The OIE Animal Welfare Working Group has made great progress to date, supported by many internationally recognised scientific experts working in OIE *ad hoc* Groups. There are still many challenges and the OIE continues to develop its standard setting work in new areas of importance to animal welfare,

such as laboratory animal welfare and more recently animal welfare in relation with livestock production systems. In these fields, the permanent input of scientific research is crucial.

May I recall that OIE standards are fully science-based because science is the unique common denomination between the 172 Members of the OIE. These Members decided to ask the OIE to become the global organisation providing standards in animal welfare to the international community.

May I also recall that adoption of OIE standards is a fully democratic process starting with a meeting of high level experts, then Working groups, Commissions elected by the General Assembly of national Delegates and finally by vote of the same General Assembly of 172 national Delegates. The adoption of standards by national Delegates represents an official commitment by Governments to try to implement these standards.

This procedure is totally different to the procedures for introduction of private standards which are **not** transparent, not democratic and often not science-based.

Also of major importance is the finalisation of the OIE recommendations on the control of stray dog populations. This work falls within the OIE mandate for animal health, public health and animal welfare, as it addresses humane methods for the control of dog populations and the prevention of important zoonotic diseases, such as rabies and hydatidosis. Rabies is particularly important in some developing countries, where rabies kills thousands of children every year, causing them tremendous suffering. I am pleased to note that a final text will be circulated with the *Terrestrial Code Commission* report towards the end of this year and will be proposed for adoption in the *Code* as a standard at the General session in May 2009.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I end by assuring you that the OIE will continue to work tirelessly to improve the animal welfare situation globally. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the European Commission, the Governments of Egypt, Australia,

Germany, New Zealand and the United States of America for their support in the organisation of this 2nd Global Conference on Animal Welfare.

I thank again all participants for joining us in this Conference.

Please help to make the conference successful by participating actively in all discussions. The Conference Resolutions will be an important input and will help to set the future direction of the OIE's and our members.

I wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you for your attention.

Dr Bernard Vallat