



**UN Secretary-General's remarks to Member States on Influenza A (H1N1)
New York, 4 May 2009**

At a time of global concern about a new strain of influenza -- A (H1N1) -- it is necessary and right that the United Nations comes together to discuss what is happening.

People the world over are worried about the health of their friends, families and children. Today our thoughts must be with all the communities that have been touched by the virus. In particular, our hearts go out to those where there has been loss of life.

There is still much that is not known about this new strain and the dangers it poses. We should not allow intense media coverage to alarm us. At the same time, we should avoid a false sense of security if such coverage declines.

In the face of uncertainty, we must be vigilant. We must pay close attention to the advice of the World Health Organization.

I thank Dr. Margaret Chan and her colleagues for their excellent work. WHO is not only leading the response for the UN system, but has also been the public face informing the world about the virus and its course. I am delighted that Dr. Chan is with us today by video from WHO headquarters in Geneva.

The current situation is yet another reminder that viruses do not respect national borders. Transmission in one country or region can threaten people all over the world.

Our response must reflect enlightened self-interest and global solidarity at its best. This is a test for us all. We need to respond with a vigorous new multilateralism. We need to help those countries, especially in the developing world, which may find it hard to respond to this threat. That is only way to secure global public health.

Fortunately, the world is better prepared than ever to deal with a pandemic.

We have a strong framework in The International Health Regulations, which were negotiated in 2005 and which establish standards for our collective response. Our challenge now is to ensure that all countries have the resources they need to maintain surveillance and protect their people. Two weeks from now in Geneva, I intend to bring donors and the private sector together to explore how all can contribute.

We also have a United Nations system that has done a tremendous amount to strengthen its readiness.

In 2006, following concerns about a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus, the UN system started to prepare for a possible pandemic. Working under a steering committee chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, a small coordination unit brought together the Secretariat, the World Bank and a broad range of agencies, funds and programmes. Governments, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, defense forces, businesses, non-governmental organizations and humanitarian organizations have also been involved.

This effort has had three primary objectives.

First, to ensure that the United Nations supports local and national authorities as they seek to meet the urgent health needs of their people.

Second, to ensure that there is little or no interruption in the critical services we provide across our agenda.

And third, to ensure the safety and security of UN staff and assets.

We have studied various possible scenarios and carried out exercises at the country and regional levels. Headquarters offices have drawn up continuity plans and tested them. Our state of preparedness is reviewed regularly.

Progress is generally good, but there is always room for improvement. The bottom line is this: if and when the world faces a severe influenza pandemic, the UN system is ready.

Dr. Chan informed me yesterday that if the situation remains as it is, WHO has no plan to raise the alert level to 6 at this moment. But WHO continues to warn that a pandemic is possible. Let us remember that even if WHO does declare Phase 6 – a pandemic – that would be a statement about the geographic spread of the virus, not its severity. Dr. Chan will have more to say about this.

Should a pandemic be declared, certain sectors will be crucial to our response. These include travel and tourism, financial services, food and agriculture, relief and civil defence.

The United Nations is helping actors in these areas examine the implications of what is known and not known about the virus so they can maintain the continuity of their operations.

Veterinarians and public health experts will also play key roles.

So will companies in the health sector. Dr. Chan and I will be looking for opportunities to work with them on joint responses to this virus and threats that may emerge in the future.

The health, livelihoods and well-being of millions of people are at stake. It is essential that we communicate clearly about what is known, and what to do, about a possible pandemic.

That means calling the outbreak by its proper name: Influenza A (H1N1). Swine flu has been a misleading and damaging misnomer, as there has been no evidence that cases are occurring as a result of contact with pigs or pork.

Any reference to the outbreak using geography is similarly problematic.

Moreover, our decisions about what to do must be based on scientific evidence or best practice. Those that are not may need to be reversed.

These include unwarranted trade and travel bans or responses concerning pork and pigs. Two days ago, WHO, FAO, the World Trade Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health issued a joint communiqué stressing that pork and pork products handled in accordance with good hygienic practices will not be a source of infection. There is no justification for banning imports.

Indeed, we must avoid overreactions that will not help contain the spread of H1N1, but which will hurt our economies, our societies and our people.

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

Influenza pandemics are unpredictable. That is why we have prepared so extensively. That is why we remain on the alert.

I have asked Dr. David Nabarro to come to New York and assist me and the Deputy Secretary-General in coordinating globally, while continuing his assignment with the High Level Task Force on Food Security.

As we hope for the best, we must also be ready for more substantial challenges in the weeks and months to come. I will count on your support, your generosity, and your understanding that we are all in this together.

The health security of any one nation requires security for all.

{Ends}