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**FOR INFORMATION**

## NINETEENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Report of the Director-General****Fifth Supplementary Report: Report and conclusions of the technical workshop on avian flu and the workplace: Preparedness and response****Introduction and background**

1. The ILO hosted a technical workshop on avian flu and the workplace: Preparedness and response, on 27 September 2006 in Geneva. The workshop, attended by employer and worker representatives and international agencies, provided an opportunity to examine critical occupational safety and health and employment and livelihood issues in the context of the Consolidated Action Plan for Contributions of the UN System with regard to the potential spread of the avian flu virus. This was the first instance to review the recently launched United Nations Action Plan specifically in the context of the world of work.
2. In order to prepare for the prevention of an avian flu pandemic and to mitigate its adverse outcomes, United Nations agencies have been actively working to develop preparedness plans on a global and regional level. The Action Plan has been developed and was first issued in July 2006. This is a rolling plan, which is to be updated every six months. The ILO has been invited to contribute to the next Action Plan due for revision early next year. Thus, this workshop acted as a forum for concrete suggestions to the UN System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIC) for incorporation in the Action Plan.
3. The ILO's tripartite structure places it in an extremely favourable position to address the concerns of governments, employers and workers with regard to avian flu threats. In addition to direct losses from the culling of poultry and decreased demand for poultry products, the threat of a pandemic further weakens already delicate structures of trade and livelihoods of backyard poultry farmers.
4. With regard to preventive action, issues of workers' rights and occupational safety and health are particularly relevant to the ILO's field of operations. Thus, there is a need for capacity building and ensuring that efficient mechanisms and infrastructures are in place to combat avian flu at the workplace and in times of a possible pandemic. Governments and the social partners, with the assistance of international organizations, should have appropriate structures in place in the event of a pandemic. Information campaigns will also be a key tool in succeeding against the adverse outcomes of avian flu. The workplace can

be enlisted as an important instrument to inform the employers, workers and the general public of precautionary measures and best practices.

## Attendees

### From ILO partner organizations

Ms. Marianne Muller (UNSIC), Mr. Sandor Beaukers (UNSIC), Ms. Katinka De Balogh (FAO), Dr. Stephen Martin (WHO), Ms. Jenny Bishop (WHO), Ms. Olga B. Jonas (World Bank), Ms. Angela Raven-Roberts (UNICEF), Ms. Anita Davies (IOM), Mr. Alan Leather (PSI), Ms. Sue Longley (IUF), Mr. Frederick Muia (IOE), Mr. Mike Muller (IATA), Mr. Muarter Kock (Health Protection Agency, UK), Mr. David Gamper (Airports Council International).

### From the ILO

Mr. Stephen Pursey (Cabinet), Mr. Rashid Amjad (ED/EMP), Mr. Alfredo Lazarte-Hoyle (ILO/CRISIS), Mr. Lawrence Jeffery Johnson (EMP/TRENDS), Dr. Igor Fedotov (SAFEWORK), Ms. Anne Herbert (DIALOGUE), Ms. Chantal Dufresne (CIS), Ms. Amrita Sietaram (ACTRAV), Mr. John Woodall (SOC/POL), Dr. Sabine Beckmann (ILO/AIDS), Mr. Seiji Machida (SAFEWORK), Ms. Michelle Nahmias (SAFEWORK), Mr. Donato Kiniger-Passigli (ILO/CRISIS) and Mr. Ahmad Bukhari (ILO/CRISIS).

## Main conclusions

5. It was suggested that the ILO would remain informed of this matter in terms of its preparedness and possible response. The ILO social partners expressed their interest in maintaining this item on their agenda and there was consensus over the need to bring this issue to the attention of the ILO Governing Body. The participants agreed to recommend the following:
  - The ILO would assist United Nations and country efforts while remaining in the existing framework laid down by the United Nations Action Plan and will endeavour to pursue programmes in order to meet the seven objectives laid down in the Action Plan.
  - The ILO would thus be a part of the consolidated United Nations effort and would address areas of occupational safety and health, modelling for the loss of livelihoods and labour market implications and information dissemination. The ILO would also emphasize the need to address the issues of workers' rights, social dialogue at all levels, social protection and the loss of incomes as a result of avian flu.
  - The ILO will identify areas in which it has a comparative advantage and can add value to existing United Nations efforts. One specific area would be to mobilize the social partners in gathering first-hand information and disseminating it through effective channels.
  - The ILO could also work with other agencies, especially the World Bank and FAO, for devising appropriate compensation, social protection, and safety net measures.

- The ILO will forward the first draft of suggestions to be incorporated in the United Nations Action Plan to UNSIC by mid-October; the suggestions would be built upon already available inputs and would be refined after consultations with the social partners and ILO technical units.
6. More specific proposals were also made for inclusion in the next version of the Consolidated Action Plan for Contributions of the UN System. These are based on the notion that avian influenza should be considered as a work-related disease for those persons who might be exposed to the virus while carrying out their professional activities. The workplace is therefore a crucial area for prevention, where social security, occupational safety and health, and the concerns of vulnerable groups such as children, migrant workers, and health workers must be addressed.
7. ILO action in the near future is expected to focus on four objectives of the United Nations Action Plan:
- protection of livelihoods;
  - ensure respect of international health regulations and set in place early warning;
  - achieve synergy between national, regional and international stakeholders;
  - provide key decision-makers with timely information and encourage behaviour change.

Geneva, 24 October 2006.

*Submitted for information.*