

# OIE 76 GENERAL SESSION

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## BELIZE'S MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE ADDRESS

Although Belize was not one of those 28 visionary countries that founded the OIE in 1924, we were one of those member countries that confirmed the decision to update the mandate of the OIE through the adoption of the OIE's Fourth Strategic Plan in May 2005. Now, the new mandate is to 'improve animal health worldwide' where along with the original mission of limiting the regional and global spread of contagious animal diseases, the scope of the OIE's standards and guidelines has been broadened to include animal welfare and animal production food safety. There is no doubt in my mind that improving animal health is a public good and, in the context of globalization, it qualifies also as a 'global public good'. This, of course, requires all member countries to share the same political will.

Technicians are quick to jot down "political will" in the assumption column of the log frames produced. But how can one exercise political will effectively and sustainably if policy makers, like myself, are not given the right information, arguments and tools? The sudden appearance of new risks to populations and agricultural sectors throughout the world, in an unprecedented context of the globalisation of pathogens and climate change means that investment in animal health mechanisms must be considered a priority. But can we invest in new national animal health systems, if we do not understand the political, social and economic benefits to be gained by this investment? Moreover, can we expect these investments to be effective if there is no good governance of the mechanisms intended to implement them? We cannot just be a voice calling for good governance. We need to also to enact enabling legislation and apply the necessary human and financial resources. This is a good investment because it will help us not only to protect ourselves from natural or bioterrorist threats linked to the reintroduction of infectious animal diseases and zoonoses but also to safeguard public health, reduce poverty and open the possibility of trading our agricultural products freely with the rest of the world.

Priority areas for investment can be identified by evaluating Veterinary Services' compliance with OIE quality standards. The OIE plays a crucial role in helping the Veterinary Services meet their new challenges, through the development and use of the 'Performance, Vision and Strategy' (PVS) tool. The PVS tool is not simply an evaluation tool; it is also a development tool since it can be used to identify failings and weaknesses and thus help in the preparation of national investment programmes to overcome these deficiencies. My country has recently been evaluated by experts trained and certified by the OIE. I strongly encourage you to not only to request the OIE the use of this PVS tool in your country but to also publicly make known the national investments programmes resulting from such an evaluation.

It is said that "no man is an island" and we increasingly see the benefits of forming alliances with intergovernmental organizations, with relevant regional organizations as well as key private sector partners. One of the strongest alliances my country has is the OIE. Recognizing its leadership as an international standard- setting body, we have used its tools to seek official

recognition as being free of Foot and mouth disease without vaccination and have also declared ourselves free of Classical swine fever in accordance with the requirements of the OIE Code.

I would like to conclude by reminding you of the considerable economic and social impact of animal diseases on the rural economy and that animal production plays a considerable role in the survival of rural communities in developing countries such as Belize. I thank you all for the invaluable assistance given to developing countries in the control of animal diseases. Your assistance is an important contribution to the fight against poverty throughout the world, in terms of both public health and support for economic and social development.

Thank you.