

**HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE'S OPENING
REMARKS TO THE REGIONAL TRAINING SEMINAR ON
DISEASES OF HONEY BEES FOR THE WORLD
ORGANIZATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH (OIE) NATIONAL
FOCAL POINTS FOR ANIMAL DISEASE NOTIFICATION TO
THE OIE, 14TH – 17TH JUNE 2011 EZULWINI SWAZILAND**

Program director
President of the Africa Commission of the OIE
The OIE Regional Representative for Africa
The OIE sub- regional representative for southern Africa
Principal Secretary
Distinguished delegates
Ladies and gentleman
I greet you all- good morning, Sanibonani

It gives me great pleasure to have been invited to officially open this OIE regional training seminar on the diseases of honey bees; under the umbrella of the OIE/European Commission (EC) project '*Better Training for Safer food for Africa*' financed by the EU.

Swaziland is an active member of the OIE having joined in the 1960s'. We pride ourselves in participating in almost all the activities of the OIE since that time, which has helped us in improving animal disease control. Application of the OIE standards contained in Terrestrial Animal Health Code has enabled access to lucrative international markets for our products of animal origin, especially beef.

The insistence of the OIE on science based non discriminatory International Standards for the control of animal diseases has contributed to the global eradication of Rinderpest (cattle plague), a disease that killed millions of cattle particularly in the developing world. I am informed that the OIE during its 79th General Session in May 2011 unanimously adopted a resolution declaring the 'Global Freedom from Rinderpest'.

Mr President the OIE shares this achievement with the FAO and the veterinary and allied professions, under the One Health Approach. Such esteemed achievement should now be extended to other diseases of global importance such as foot and mouth disease (FMD), avian influenza (AI) and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

I am informed the OIE already has a global strategy for the control of foot and mouth disease with the long term intention of eradicating this menace. There have been some dissenting voices that say FMD can not be eradicated. Swaziland says FMD can be eradicated if again global resources (human, material etc) can be directed to eliminating the disease at source, as per the One Health Approach.

As for BSE, to- date has never affected Africa and application of OIE standards globally seems to be eliminating this disease quickly. However, Mr President, the OIE recognition of member countries for the freedom or level of risk as regards to BSE is of concern. The fact that countries that never had a clinical and/or laboratory case are classified as unspecified risk, yet they apply stringent controls, seems to be at odds with scientific bases for standards.

Coming back to today's topic Mr President; honey bees are wonderful creatures that contribute immeasurably to global food security and therefore human existence. Whilst visiting flowers to get nectar honey bees pollinate plants, effectively they are the main breeders of plants. The annual value of honey bee pollination of agricultural crops globally is estimated at 153 billion Euros. Their contribution to the pollination of forests and wild flora can only be greater. Mr President it is therefore no exaggeration to say honey bees are an integral part of biodiversity.

Recognition of the importance of honey bees in Swaziland dates back to the colonial era. The Importation of Bees act 16 /1910 introduced controls on the entry of bees and their products into the country. This legislation was largely to prevent the introduction of American Foulbrood, European Foulbrood and other exotic diseases of honey bees. Swaziland remains free from these diseases; however the country cannot afford any complacency. As such the country recently re-launched commercialization of honey bees and also re-strengthened disease surveillance.

The traditional methodologies of burning rubber, to subdue bees, whilst harvesting honey is one of the major causes of forest fires here in Swaziland. In recent years such fires affected the agro- forestry industry in the country almost to the point of collapse. Just to put things into perspective; Swaziland had 120 000 hectares covered by commercial forests, and agro- forestry was the second largest employer.

Commercialization of honey bee farming, training farmers and communities modern methods of honey harvesting greatly reduces forest fires. Therefore it benefits the economy and preserves biodiversity.

Mr. President, let me conclude my speech by welcoming you to the Kingdom of Eswatini and thanking the OIE for choosing Swaziland to host this important seminar. Please feel at home and enjoy the warm ambience of the country.

It is now my singular honour to declare this seminar officially opened.

May the Good Lord Bless you