



agriculture

Department:  
Agriculture  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**OPENING STATEMENT: THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND  
LAND AFFAIRS REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA.  
RIFT VALLEY FEVER WORKSHOP  
PROTEA HOTEL: BLOEMFONTEIN: 16-18 FEBRUARY 2009**

DELIVERED BY THE CVO OF SA.

**PROGRAMME DIRECTOR  
REPRESENTATIVE OF AU-IBAR  
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OIE  
REPRESENTATIVE OF FAO  
REPRESENTATIVE OF EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SADC  
DELEGATES FROM SADC MEMBER STATES  
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN  
ALL PROTOCOL OBSERVED**

The Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs would have loved to open this workshop. She is unfortunately not able to be with us today due to other engagements. The workshops come at a time when South Africans are readying themselves for the fourth democratic elections and a couple of days after both the state of the Nation address by President Kgalema Motlanthe and the budget speech by the Minister of finance.

It is also coming at a time after a great happening in Zimbabwe, the swearing in of the Prime Minister and other cabinet members. All will be well in Africa.

I welcome you all on behalf of the Republic of South Africa and my department.

Ladies and gentlemen

In our endeavors to manage and control animal diseases, we need leadership, clear objectives, strategy and regular communication of empowering information so as to lead to improved or enhanced human resources to do the job. Although many of these are already in place, it is necessary to ensure continued common understanding of concepts to consolidate our knowledge for future use.

Both Agriculture and conservation has been identified as major regional drivers of economic development. Livestock is one of the key components of integrated agriculture in our continent as it contributes significantly to rural livelihoods of many households. These livelihoods were fragile during the past few years.

These years were characterized by soaring oil and food price and rapidly rising living standards. There have also been droughts, floods, veld fires and other adverse weather conditions. The production and productivity of livestock for most agro-pastoralists and pastoralists has been constrained by re-emergence and continued occurrence of many diseases one of which is the subject of discussion today.

We have seen oil prices falling recently, but however the price of food has not necessarily followed. Recently however, we experienced another serious challenge, a global financial crises which continues to pound on the rural poor. Livestock continues to be more important,

and the leadership that we alluded to earlier becomes even more critical.

We therefore need to take the animal health sector forward in a coordinated manner in order to:

- strengthen disease surveillance and diagnostics;
- develop much-needed capacity in human and veterinary health systems;
- ensure the availability of veterinary medicines and vaccines;
- increase public awareness; and
- address social and economic impacts – particularly in countries that are at especially high risk of disease infection and that have the greatest resource needs.

In his opening address of the 75<sup>th</sup> general assembly, Dr O Neil stressed that the OIE cannot be a purely veterinary organisation, and that to succeed we need expert scientists from many disciplines including food safety, fish and bee experts, wildlife experts, and animal welfare experts. Considering the important topic to be discussed this week, I believe that this principle will be applied since the emergence and re-emergence of diseases could be influenced by many factors, including as I believe we all know, climate change.

I know surely that veterinarians will be in the majority and in the spirit of governance, would also believe that a wide spectrum of veterinary professionals will be participating.

The subject for our coming together is very interesting and needs to be looked into with an open mind.

We are faced with many challenges in our endeavors to manage animal diseases for the benefit of man environment and animals. Some pathogens adapt to our interventions, the environment changes nullifying our interventions or making them less effective. The survival of vectors that help carry some of the pathogens is somehow favored by the changing environment whereas transport systems improve, carrying some pathogens much further and much faster than the times they take to manifest under normal circumstances. For some reasons the pathogens that were known to be under control re-appear sometimes with much more determination to cause damage than they were known to cause.

Some apparent return in damage causing ability can sometimes be attributed to the tendency of our collective beings to forget how to respond to invasion, but some need some thorough understanding and knowledge sharing as it is now going to happen at this workshop.

Common understanding of animal diseases and regional approaches to control them is important. The bi-directional transmission of some infectious diseases between wild life and domesticated animals is an important component of the triangular interface between human/livestock and wild life, and this is a significant point to take into consideration in disease control.

Our approach to diseases control has led many countries to continue to impose excessive and unjustifiable import barriers due to outbreaks of diseases. This has contributed to unnecessary increase of price for animal products that would have contributed to better nutrition. It is therefore important that this aspect also be discussed.

It is important that disease control measures be harmonised and it is in this common understanding that harmonisation will be made very simple. As the environment changes and the vectors adapt their way of life and the pathogens change, we must become better in our endeavors to manage and control all these factors. The collective of our thinking and strategy formulation will without doubt be our best weapon

To focus a little on the programme, interesting topics will be discussed particularly issues around regional approaches, vaccines, diagnosis and trade. It is my understanding that similar workshops have been held in Dakar and Cairo to particularly look at the challenge of re-emergence of Rift Valley Fever. I believe that the experiences and outcome of those interactions will be shared in this workshop and that in the end, clear action plans to deal with this disease will be in place.

I take this opportunity to thank the OIE Sub-Regional Office for choosing South Africa, particularly this province, which happens to be one of the major agricultural provinces of this country, to host this workshop.

In conclusion I once more welcome you all and believe that we will have fruitful discussions.

