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## PRESS RELEASE

### Regional Experts and Governments Cooperating to Battle Avian Influenza Outbreaks

Veterinary and sanitary epidemiology control experts from throughout Central Asia and representatives of various donor organizations gathered from June 9-11, 2008 in Almaty, Kazakhstan to discuss the dangers of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1), its monitoring and response to potential outbreaks. The experts also laid out plans for regional cooperation that will help minimize risks avian influenza creates for animals, people, and the economy. The event was financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and ADB/CAREC, with the Kazakh National Agrarian University hosting the event.

The event was opened by Bill Frej, Director of the Central Asia Regional USAID Mission. The experts discussed ways for improving regional collaboration by establishing a network for communication and information exchange. The group examined best practices used worldwide and discussed ways to apply them in Central Asia. Participants planned to create a framework for institutionalizing regional information exchange, surveillance, preparedness monitoring, and assessment mechanisms. An action plan was created to guide future work, including a series of other meetings and conferences, in establishing a regional coordination group. Such group will be responsible for assisting international agencies in organizing their assistance in this area.

In the summer of 2006 Kazakhstan experienced seven outbreaks, luckily there had been no cases reported in humans. In total, eradication/depopulation efforts have been undertaken on all cases in 4 oblasts, with the total of 13,000 birds eradicated. The Government of Kazakhstan demonstrated to be genuinely interested in identifying and containing infections caused by H5N1 Avian Influenza, as well as other animal diseases.

Since the first outbreaks of this type of avian influenza in Kazakhstan, USAID has started providing assistance to the governments of Central Asian countries to enhance their preparedness to possible outbreaks. Assistance has focused on veterinary services, poultry producers, and emergency response and other key government agencies in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Winrock International, the primary contractor for USAID-funded activities working on prevention and response to avian influenza, has trained over 1200 key veterinary and laboratory specialists throughout the region, created and distributed educational materials to industry and education institutions, and worked with governments in examining best practices of the surveillance and response. Other donors such as Development Bank/Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (ADB/CAREC), the World Health Organization, and the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) are providing additional assistance.

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