



2008 Global Health Security Initiative
Ministerial Week, EC, Brussels



COMMUNIQUÉ
NINTH MINISTERIAL MEETING
OF THE GLOBAL HEALTH SECURITY INITIATIVE
Brussels, Belgium - December 5, 2008

We, Ministers/Secretaries/Commissioner of Health from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union, today concluded the 2008 Ministerial Meeting of the Global Health Security Initiative (GHSI) in Brussels, which was hosted by the European Commission.

On the occasion of this Ministerial Meeting, we discussed key priorities for our collective preparedness and response to the threat of international chemical, biological and radio-nuclear (CBRN) terrorism and pandemic influenza; demonstrated our support for the accomplishments we have achieved together through this initiative; and identified future activities to advance our current and emerging priorities in global health security.

1. Strengthening Global Health Security

Our discussions today allowed us to deepen our common understanding of key elements that contribute to strengthened global health security, including in the following areas:

- The GHSI will continue to make a concerted effort to share best practices in borders management for the purposes of health security, assess the effectiveness of chosen approaches and technologies, as well as to align strategies, where appropriate.
- For example, in the event of the emergence of a human influenza pandemic, we share the public health objective of delaying the spread of the pandemic. Building on results from scientific collaboration between our countries and on regional and sectoral initiatives, we recognize that even highly restrictive measures, such as general border closures, would be unlikely to prevent the spread of the virus. Such closures would not have significant public health benefits and could aggravate the economic and social consequences of an influenza pandemic. We are actively exploring a range of traveller screening measures, which could contribute to disease control without unnecessarily interfering with travel and trade, while playing a part in meeting our public health objectives. In addition, we acknowledge that screening practices will vary by country and are dependent upon culture, legal authorities, and resource requirements.

- With respect to the sharing of samples of influenza viruses, we reaffirm that all nations should commit to the rapid and transparent sharing of influenza viruses, consistent with the revised International Health Regulations (2005), which are critical to pandemic preparedness and response, and key to facilitating innovative research and development for needed countermeasures, including vaccines. We remain committed to strengthening the Global Influenza Surveillance Network and we support the World Health Organization's intergovernmental process as a means of achieving consensus on sample-sharing. Our hopes are that the next Inter-Governmental Meeting will result in an agreement that meets important milestones in international pandemic preparedness, and will explore options to share benefits from a collaborative approach, with an emphasis on increasing access by developing countries to influenza vaccines. We will continue to monitor related discussions taking place in other fora.
- With respect to the revised International Health Regulations (2005), we support their ongoing implementation and are committed to demonstrating leadership in this regard. We will continue to contribute to capacity building activities, in partnership with the WHO, that facilitate the implementation of the Regulations and strengthen health security globally.
- Regarding medical countermeasures, we considered the need to develop a sustainable global infrastructure that would allow us to work together to counteract the health consequences of natural or man-made threats. Our initial efforts will focus on sharing information on research and development; improving diagnostics capacity; developing strategies for shelf life extension of stockpiled medical countermeasures; and collaborating on the development of specific therapeutics, vaccines, and/or diagnostic tools for specific threats.
- We acknowledge that many sectors play a role in maintaining health security in the context of CBRN threats and pandemic influenza, and emphasize the importance of furthering partnerships across sectors. Our Governments, and in particular the GHSI, are well positioned to assume a unique role in advancing these partnerships.
- We support the ongoing assessment of the threats and risks to our collective health security and are committed to examining how we, as an initiative, identify, assess and respond to both current and emerging risks.
- We discussed the importance of cross-national exercises as a tool for building our collective response capacity on a range of CBRN threats and encourage the continued use of exercises among and between GHSI members.

2. Accomplishments in 2007-2008

In the past year, through a range of technical, scientific and policy networks and initiatives, we succeeded in making progress addressing key risks to global health security. This progress stems from our collective efforts and common approaches in areas such as prevention, research, preparedness and response. In 2007-2008, our cooperation has included actions such as:

- The completion of a **priority-setting** process to identify issues of common interest, and to determine where the GHSI can best complement efforts undertaken by Governments, as well as regional and multilateral bodies;
- Strengthened information-sharing on **risk and crisis communications strategies**, including discussions on national case studies and lessons learned;
- The regular sharing of national plans for **pandemic influenza** preparedness, and ongoing efforts to improve our knowledge with respect to the effectiveness of specific preparedness measures;
- The identification of specific collaboration opportunities to expand access to **medical countermeasures** needed to address the potential health consequences of CBRN agents and pandemic influenza;
- The strengthening of our partnership as a forum to discuss global health security and public health issues of common concern, including **borders management** during public health emergencies;
- Engagement in **emergency exercises** to ensure that a responsive and efficient network is in place among members, to address health threats as they arise; and
- Building of more **sustainable response strategies** within and among GHSI members, strengthening ties across relevant scientific and technical areas. Recent workshops on Anthrax and Ricin have contributed to improved preparedness.

3. **Future Commitments**

Today, we also renewed our commitment to the GHSI and agreed to continue to take concerted action to improve our preparedness and response to global health threats. We identified the following priorities for work by the GHSI in 2009 and beyond:

- On **risk and crisis communications**, we agreed to continue our collaboration to strengthen our collective knowledge and to apply the principles of risk and crisis communications in specific situations.
- We agreed to enhance our **laboratory capabilities** by improving the transportation of diagnostic specimens and reference materials; facilitating the exchange of scientific expertise among members; and strengthening diagnostic capacities, both within and beyond member laboratories. This will be extended to an international network of radiobioassay laboratories.

- We supported increased GHSI coordination to improve global **early alerting and reporting**, including risk assessment and integrated analysis of CBRN and pandemic influenza threats, and recognize that the GHSI can bring added value in stimulating the timely exchange of information toward the prevention of risks to health.
- We agreed to enhance our preparedness for CBRN threats and pandemic influenza by collaborating in moving towards a sustainable global infrastructure, including research and development, for **medical countermeasures**.
- We welcomed the proposal of Commissioner for Health Ms Androulla Vassiliou to have a **joint cross-national exercise** organised between the GHSI partners and the European Union in 2010. The exercise will support the work of the GHSI in the area of risk and crisis communications.

Having reviewed the areas of work proposed by senior policy and scientific officials, we are satisfied that projected activities and timelines are consistent with our current priorities, and we emphasize the continued importance of the GHSI's adaptability in preventing, preparing for and responding to new and emerging threats, including those related to the security of the food supply chain.

We welcomed the offer from the Minister of State for Public Health, United Kingdom, to host our next Ministerial meeting.

The statement was endorsed by the following Health Ministers, Secretaries and senior officials:

- Ms. Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner for Health, European Commission
- The Honourable Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin, Ministre de la santé, de la jeunesse, des sports, et de la vie associative, France
- The Right Honourable Dawn Primarolo, M.P., Minister of State for Public Health, United Kingdom
- Ms. Suzanne Vinet, Associate Deputy Minister, on behalf of the Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, M.P., Minister of Health, Canada
- Dr. Klaus Theo Schröder, Deputy Minister, on behalf of the Honourable Ulla Schmidt, MdB, Minister of Health, Germany
- Dr. Fabrizio Oleari, Director General, on behalf of the Honourable Maurizio Sacconi, Minister of Labour, Health, and Social Policy, Italy
- Dr. Takashi Taniguchi, Assistant Minister for Technical Affairs, on behalf of the Honourable Yoichi Masuzoe, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan
- Dr. Mauricio Hernández Ávila, Undersecretary of Health Promotion and Prevention, on behalf of the Honourable Dr. José Ángel Córdova Villalobos, Secretary of Health, Mexico
- Dr. Tevi Troy, Deputy Secretary, on behalf of the Honourable Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary of Health and Human Services, United States