Press Information

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WSAVA and OIE Call on Political Leaders for Action on Rabies

The recent cases of rabies reported in both in the Netherlands and France have highlighted the importance of the high level symposium held by the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in Paris to explore strategies to manage and eliminate canine rabies. The outcome of the meeting is a joint statement which sets out the course of action that is required to make real progress in rabies control.

The Symposium, entitled 'One Health: Rabies and Other Disease Risks from Free-Roaming Dogs' was jointly chaired by Dr Bernard Vallat, Director General of the OIE, and Professor Michael Day, Chairman of the WSAVA One Health Committee. Speakers from around the world shared their experiences of managing free-roaming dog populations, the main source of human rabies and hundreds of millions of dog bites worldwide, which require post-exposure treatment.

During her lecture, Professor Sarah Cleaveland, Professor of Comparative Epidemiology at the Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine, University of Glasgow, commented that rabies causes the deaths of 150 people every day, kills numerous animals and threatens several endangered species, including the Ethiopian Wolf. Most cases are in Asia and Africa, while the global burden of efforts to control the disease stands at $5 billion annually. She explained that rabies could be eliminated by a coordinated global mass vaccination initiative and that this would be more cost effective than human post-exposure prophylaxis alone. She also highlighted successful coordinated schemes in countries such as Tanzania, Chile and Argentina.
Commenting on the Symposium, Professor Day said: "Our discussions represent the culmination of three years' work by the WSAVA One Health Committee and follow the Memorandum of Understanding between OIE and the WSAVA, signed in 2011. It is significant that we discussed often neglected issues relating to small companion animal welfare and disease in the historic headquarters of the OIE. Our summary statement sets out how small companion animal practitioners can engage with the global fight to eliminate canine rabies, while protecting the social importance of the bond that develops between people and their pets. The scale of human misery caused by this canine vaccine-preventable infection should not be tolerated in the 21st Century. We urge political leaders in countries where the disease is endemic to take action by establishing disease control programmes."

Dr Bernard Vallat, Director General of the OIE, added: “Rabies still causes up to 60,000 human deaths every year. More than 95% of human rabies cases are transmitted by dogs. Yet, rabies can be prevented at animal source; vaccination of dogs remains the most cost-effective, single intervention that protects humans from contracting the disease. A global dog vaccination campaign could be funded with just a small fraction of the funds currently used in post-exposure prophylaxis in humans. Vaccination of just 70% of a dog population leads to elimination of rabies in dogs”.

Notes to editors:

The OIE-WSAVA joint statement on control of canine rabies can be found on the following websites:


WSAVA - [http://www.wsava.org/](http://www.wsava.org/)

BSAVA - [http://www.bsava.com/](http://www.bsava.com/)
The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) raises global awareness on the need to control rabies in dogs. Through the One Health concept the OIE encourages public – private partnerships in order to provide help to its Member Countries with implementing appropriate prevention and control methods as found in OIE’s international standards. In close collaboration with major donor organisations the OIE has already established regional vaccine banks to support the fight against rabies.

The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) is an umbrella organization representing 180,000 veterinarians globally through 95 member associations.

The WSAVA's One Health Committee has rabies as its key focus and is already active, having launched a dog collar and wristband campaign last year as part of an on-going control programme in Africa. Through its charitable foundation, the WSAVA Foundation, it is also supporting Mission Rabies, a WVS-led project to eliminate the disease in some regions of India.

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