

Remarks by Under Secretary Edward M. Avalos (As Prepared)
Signing of MARD/CDC Letter of Intent on AHI
Wednesday, 21 April 2010, 10:00 AM

Vice Minister Bui Ba Bong, Doctor Luong The Phiet, Doctor Hoang Van Nam, Assistant Secretary Kerri-Ann Jones, Doctor Bruce Gellin, and other distinguished guests.

I am very pleased to attend and observe the signing of this Letter of Intent. It strengthens the relationship between the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and marks the first cooperation between the Department of Animal Health and CDC. In March, Assistant Secretary Jones and Vice Minister Bong agreed that signing this Letter at the International Ministerial Conference for Animal and Pandemic Influenza (IMCAPI) was an excellent way to show our mutual commitment to joint cooperation at the interface of human and animal health. One month later, both sides are sitting here, shaking hands, and toasting successful progress.

Recognizing the importance of agriculture in both economic development and animal health, we must forge innovative approaches to cooperation. Increasing evidence from around the world points to man's interaction with animals and the environment as the root cause of many infectious diseases in humans. As we have heard during IMCAPI, cooperation between the animal and human health sectors is critical in responding to existing and emerging pandemics. We must work across traditional boundaries, whether between veterinary and human medicine, between the private sector and the public sector, or between industrial manufacturers and academic researchers.

This letter paves the way for the next concrete step: establishing a set of cooperative activities supported by both governments that will tackle pressing animal and human health questions. To do this, we must first gather evidence on the risks and pathways at the intersection of animal and human infectious disease.

The proposed cooperation takes advantage of long-term relationships between the governments of Vietnam and the United States. It builds on the current partnerships between the Influenza Program of U.S. CDC in Vietnam and the Vietnamese Ministry of Health. The new partnership establishes activities between CDC and three main groups within MARD: DAH Epidemiology Division, National Centre for Veterinary Diagnostics, and National Institute of Veterinary Research. This work complements other cooperative work in Vietnam among USDA, USAID, World Health Organization, and Food and Agricultural Organization.

The United States government is extraordinarily pleased to continue and enhance the existing support in Vietnam. On the occasion of this signing, I wish DAH and CDC, as well as all partners involved in these tremendous challenges of health, continued success.

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