



NOTE FOR THE PRESS

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**Note for the press 23
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GLOBAL DISEASE SURVEILLANCE AND RESPONSE

Comments on global disease surveillance attributed to World Health Organization (WHO) staff by a Washington Post staff writer (published 5 November, 2003) do not represent the view of the Organization. WHO:

- welcomes the efforts by national authorities to strengthen disease surveillance. In SARS, as with other global public health threats, early detection of outbreaks is the key to limiting harm. Diseases know no borders so strengthening national or regional surveillance systems makes the entire world better prepared. WHO encourages all Member States to strengthen their national capacities, and to contribute to international technical cooperation in global alert and response. Investments in surveillance and response capacity – particularly on the front line for public health – will strengthen our defences against disease outbreaks;
- has established and made operational a global alert and response system that rapidly identifies and verifies events and provides a framework for the coordination of international outbreak response. This global system is built on a technical partnership with institutions in the G8 countries and other Member States and provides the operational arm for the International Health Regulations which are currently being revised;
- fully recognizes the support of all countries to WHO, including the United States and other G8 countries, in surveillance and control of disease. This support maintains the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network's readiness to respond to emergencies. For example, most recently in the spring SARS outbreaks, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (of the US Department of Health and Human Services) provided half of the technical assistance deployed to the field;
- in response to the concerns of Member States about bioterrorism, is working with countries to ensure it has the capacity to respond. This includes seeing that critical response staff have the support and protection to do their job in safety. Thus a small number of WHO first responders have been vaccinated against smallpox;
- is working to build support amongst all potential donors for increased and sustained contributions toward global health security. This is essential to strengthen capacity to identify disease outbreaks and act against them. Investing in international surveillance and response is, at the same time, an investment in national health security.

For more information, contact Christine McNab, Communications Officer, Director-General's Office, WHO, Tel: +41 22 791 4688; Mobile phone: +41 79 254 6815; Email: mcnabc@who.int. All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features as well as other information on this subject can be obtained on the Internet on the WHO home page <http://www.who.int/>