

# INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## EAST, SOUTHEAST AND SOUTH ASIA: AVIAN INFLUENZA

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*The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 183 countries.*

### In Brief

**This Bulletin (no. 04/2005) is being issued for information on measures that Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are taking in response to the increasing threats to humans of avian influenza throughout Asia, and reflects the status of the situation and information available at this time.**

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### The Situation

The past seven weeks has seen one of the largest outbreaks of avian influenza (H5N1) since its re-emergence in 2003, with the disease being detected in at least 29 countries now. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there have been 186 human cases and 105 deaths since 2003, with 29 of the deaths (over 25 per cent of the total) occurring during the first quarter of 2006. Close to 90 per cent of these human cases and deaths occur in the Southeast and East Asian region. As incidences of H5N1 in humans and in animals have spread around the world, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are mobilizing existing networks of health education professionals and volunteers to implement prevention activities, bringing key information to vulnerable communities and the public. In Asia, which has seen the greatest number of human cases and deaths, national societies have launched public health education activities focusing on disease prevention and early detection. The Federation Secretariat has committed support to these national societies, intensified by the release of funds for activities related to avian influenza. In the meantime, the German Red Cross and Irish Red Cross are supporting Red Cross activities through the national societies in Viet Nam, China and India.



*Red Cross volunteers from all over Asia are engaging with local communities.*

**East Asia**

To date, the total number of reported human cases of avian influenza in China's mainland stands at 16. Of these cases, 11 people have died, with the most recent death occurring in Shanghai in the third week of March. Since 2005, a total of 35 outbreaks in birds have been reported in China, with a total of 22.8 million fowl having been culled to date in efforts to prevent the disease from spreading. At the same time, outbreaks of the virus in Europe and Africa have been traced to the discovery of thousands of dead migratory birds at Qinghai Lake in western China in 2005. The lake is a gathering place for many birds that eventually join others to migrate through Africa, Asia and Europe.

Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea have all reported incidences of the H5N1 virus in animals over the past two years. In April 2005, instances of bird flu, although not the dangerous H5N1 strain, were reported on two chicken farms in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

**Southeast Asia**

In Southeast Asia, six countries have reported outbreaks of H5N1 to date: Viet Nam, Thailand, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Indonesia and Malaysia. Such simultaneous occurrence of large epidemics of H5N1 influenza in domestic poultry is unprecedented. Despite the mass culling and the pre-emptive destruction of some 150 million birds, H5N1 is now considered endemic in Indonesia, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, and possibly also the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Such endemic status of the H5N1 in domestic poultry populations in South East Asia has caused frequent spill-overs into populations of migratory birds, which in turn may lead to the virus becoming endemic in migratory wild bird populations, a major shift in the epidemiology of H5N1.

Although the actual number of documented human cases has been steadily growing over the past years, it remains relatively low given the potential exposure of millions of people to the H5N1 virus in South East Asia. The human epidemic is currently concentrated in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam, with the total cumulative number of confirmed cases standing at 149 (80 per cent of all cases worldwide, as of 24 March 2006). From these 149, 83 (60 per cent) persons have died. The latest case has occurred in Cambodia when a three-year old girl died on 21 March and subsequently tested positive for the H5N1 virus. Indonesia's human cases of avian influenza are occurring with increasing frequency. Of 20 WHO confirmed fatalities from the H5N1 virus, nine have been in 2006.

**South Asia**

In February to March 2006 alone, three countries in South Asia – Afghanistan, India and Pakistan – have registered cases of the H5N1 avian influenza virus in animals. No human infection by the virus has been reported. Thirteen outbreaks avian influenza were confirmed in poultry in five provinces of Afghanistan on 13 March. Two outbreaks of avian influenza, later confirmed to be H5N1, were reported in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. About 23,500 birds from two poultry and breeder farms have been consequently culled.

India in particular has been affected by these outbreaks, where major culling has taken place in and around the districts of Nandurbar and Jalgaon in the state of Maharashtra this past two months (400,000 birds culled). Surveillance activities are being carried out over a ten km radius from the two affected areas of Nandurbar and Jalgaon, where cases of fever and upper respiratory tract infections (URI) have been identified. The World Organization for Animal Health also reports cases found in Uchhal, Gujarat, also confirmed on 18 February.

India, like many other South Asian countries, has a high population density with high levels of illiteracy, making it vulnerable to the spread of avian influenza. The situation is being closely monitored and is currently under control.

Despite claims by poultry associations that it is still safe to eat chicken, many people are avoiding consuming chicken and eggs. Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka have already banned poultry products from India. India's poultry industry is valued at an estimated USD 6.7 billion; however, sales are down by 60 per cent in the country and this is bound to have a negative impact on the country's poultry farmers. Subsequently, compensation of INR 13.4 million (CHF 382,352) has been paid to poultry farmers.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

### East Asia

#### Red Cross Society of China



*A branch staff talks to villagers about information material on avian influenza developed by RCSC and the American Red Cross.*

As the threat of avian influenza continues to increase in China, senior management and staff at the Red Cross Society of China's (RCSC) Beijing-based headquarters, along with the national society's extensive network of provincial and local-level branches, are currently looking for creative and effective ways of reaching a massive and ethnically diverse population<sup>1</sup> with important information about how to prevent the contraction and spread of avian influenza.

The RCSC has identified the society's role in addressing the threat of the virus by improving community awareness and preparedness about the prevention of avian influenza. In addition, the RCSC provincial branches are considering

providing assistance to families who are seriously affected by avian influenza (i.e. those families where a family member either dies or suffers a disability due to the disease, or sustains a substantial economic loss).

In order to promote much needed public awareness about prevention and transmission as well as reduce the threat posed by the disease to communities, the RCSC in partnership with the American Red Cross organized a two-day national avian influenza prevention conference during the third week of March. There were approximately 75 participants representing the RCSC's 31 provincial level branches, and others from the country's six major municipalities.

Key personnel from appropriate ministries such as China's ministries of health and agriculture attended the conference. Other major stakeholders were in present as well, including representatives from the Viet Nam Red Cross, the Hong Kong branch of the RCSC, the Federation Secretariat as well as international agencies such as the World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The RCSC branches from Liaoning, Anhui and Sichuan also described public health education activities carried out by the branches following incidences of avian influenza in these provinces. Also in attendance was a health staff member from the Republic of Korea Red Cross headquarters, signalling the starting point for the national society's avian influenza activities.

During the conference, participants actively engaged in open question and answer sessions and group work. These sessions were opportunities to address some of the primary issues RCSC branches are dealing with in designing and implementing avian influenza public education campaigns. One concern that was expressed by several conference participants was a fear of scaring the public if information about the virus was distributed in an area before a case of avian influenza actually occurred. Highlighting the role health education information plays in preventing the spread of avian influenza, both the RCSC's vice president and executive vice president reinforced the RCSC's responsibility in coordination with the government to conduct public education activities throughout the country, regardless of whether or not there has been an actual outbreak in the area. Experiences in Liaoning, Anhui and Sichuan also functioned as good examples of how panic is far less likely to occur when the general public is kept well informed, while panic is more likely to be triggered by a lack of information or unsubstantiated rumours.

The RCSC conference was the start of a national education campaign, where the RCSC, with support from the American Red Cross, will engage its extensive nationwide network of 70,000 grassroots units, 2,562 county and

<sup>1</sup> China is home to 1.307 billion people (approximately 4.4 times the size of the United States, the world's third most populated country) spread over a massive and topographically complex area of 9,596,960 sq km.

district branches, 347 prefecture and city branches and 31 provincial branches, to disseminate millions of pamphlets and posters on the prevention of avian influenza. At the same time, the Federation Secretariat released funds during the second week of March for the RCSC to implement activities and awareness campaigns on prevention, which will build upon the strategies identified at the conference. The German Red Cross has kindly responded by supporting with funds the national society's activities linked to China's H5N1 activities.

The RCSC is well positioned to implement community-based health education initiatives based on experiences learned from addressing severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Experiences obtained through the RCSC's Federation-supported community vulnerability reduction project are also valuable, as it emphasised and developed the national society's understanding of the importance of participatory community-based health education activities. Analysis of existing health education resources and identification of realistic solutions for participatory health and hygiene education in rural villages over the past three years has led to the development of activities and resources that are locally appropriate, incorporating aspects of Chinese culture, ideology and management style.

The RCSC's network of branches has facilitated the society's capacity to move forward with public education initiatives. Over the past six months, the RCSC's health department has been working with the American Red Cross on developing a national campaign intended to educate the general public about known prevention measures that people can take against contracting avian influenza. Through this partnership, the RCSC created an initial set of materials for distribution in rural areas. The RCSC distributed information pamphlets and posters in seven provinces prior to the final week of January (Lunar New Year). Additional financial support from UNICEF allowed for the production of further materials, which was then distributed several weeks later in an additional seven provinces. At the same time, representatives from the RCSC's project management office have participated in the Federation's avian influenza coordination mechanisms in Geneva and Bangkok.

#### **Hong Kong Red Cross (HKRC) Branch of the Red Cross Society of China**

The current strain of avian influenza – H5N1 – first appeared in Hong Kong in 1997, infecting 18 people and killing six. The most recent case in animals was reported on 25 March in a Peregrine falcon found in Tin Shui Wai. Since the start of 2006, the Hong Kong Red Cross branch has continued to actively develop existing activities and implement new avian influenza initiatives. The preventive education programmes of the Hong Kong Red Cross is expanding from its staff, members, volunteers and service customers to about 260 schools, with the supply of a package of educational materials, including health news, display panels, CD-ROMs and health tip calendar cards. About 82,000 health news and 110,000 calendar cards were distributed respectively. Up to 10,000 hygiene kits were produced, with 1,300 distributed to vulnerable individuals so far. An English language version of the health news was published, and, a second issue also on avian influenza will be further published. After meeting with the department of health, a hotline service to answer public enquiries was considered as a possible support from the Hong Kong Red Cross during an outbreak of the H5N1 virus, besides preventive education.

#### **Mongolian Red Cross Society**

Representatives from the Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS), the Federation and the WHO have begun to explore the potential role the Mongolian Red Cross can play in conducting avian influenza prevention activities in Mongolia, reaching both the country's nomadic and widespread herding population and increasing the number of urban poor. Although chicken is not widely eaten or kept by Mongolian herders, avian influenza poses a threat to the country as the country hosts some 380 different types of migratory birds over its 2,000 lakes. For herders, access to water is most important in the summer, with summer pasturage tending to be on high ground adjacent to rivers and lakes. In August 2005, for example, 111 people from 28 families had to move from Erkhel Lake when a high state of quarantine was declared after 86 dead birds were found in the area. At the same time, although chicken is not widely consumed, there are an estimated 60,000 domestic birds in the country.

#### **Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea**

As an auxiliary to the government, the Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK Red Cross) seeks to implement activities intended to protect and improve the health of the most vulnerable. The DPRK Red Cross has traditionally conducted health and care activities, including community-based first aid, health promotion and social welfare, relying upon the society's nationwide network of volunteers. The DPRK Red Cross, in cooperation with the ministry of public health, played an active role in prevention and preparedness

interventions against SARS in 2003-2004, where the society obtained experience in the prevention of potentially devastating epidemics.

Given the growing frequency of incidences of avian influenza around the world, the DPRK government established an emergency “anti-epidemic” committee, comprising relevant human and animal health ministries to address the threat of avian influenza. The DPRK Red Cross, as with the response to SAR, and at the request of the government, is working closely with the authorities on joint avian influenza prevention and preparedness initiatives.

The national society has drafted a comprehensive action plan in response to the virus. The plan includes preparedness activities such as: public education campaigns; playing a role in the coordination of H5N1 activities with international organizations, the Federation and the ministry of public health; contingency planning; and, ensuring that medical institutions have sufficient supplies of hygiene and barrier kits.

### **Southeast Asia**

As per decision of Red Cross and Red Crescent regional leadership, 11 societies have formed a regional working group on avian influenza. The Federation’s regional health unit for Southeast Asia has been functioning as its secretariat. Since its establishment in early 2006, the group has met twice and successfully completed its task to develop an avian influenza regional framework. This framework will be used to guide national society actions and outline the Federation’s regional assistance strategies on avian influenza. Using this framework, the regional health unit will appeal to the international community for assistance towards country- and regional-level activities. As a part of this process, all national societies except two (Thai Red Cross Society and Brunei Darussalam Red Crescent Society) have developed or finalized their national prevention and preparedness plans of actions on avian influenza.



*Palang Merah Indonesia is actively disseminating information brochures on H5N1.*

In addition, the regional health unit for Southeast Asia has initiated monthly regional coordination and information sharing meetings among regional offices of international organizations and United Nations (UN) offices based in Bangkok. These meetings are intended to provide regional bodies with an informal setting where they can share their experiences, and in the long run, to enable to work towards regional solidarity among concerned organizations in order to tackle the universal threat of a pandemic.

### **Cambodian Red Cross Society**

In January 2006, Cambodian Red Cross Society, Viet Nam Red Cross Society and Lao Red Cross have signed a joint cooperation agreement, which among others included cross-border issues in situations of health emergencies like avian influenza. This cooperation agreement has been also endorsed by their respective governments. With the support of the American Red Cross, the Cambodian Red Cross plans to host a national-level health conference for the development of standard avian influenza prevention and health messages in the next month. This event will involve representatives from all 24 branches and external and respective government organizations.

### **Indonesian Red Cross Society**

The Indonesian Red Cross Society or Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI) has looked into the effectiveness of its avian influenza public education campaign conducted earlier in the previous year, in order to integrate the lessons learnt from it into its future public awareness activities. It is commendable that during this campaign PMI has distributed over 400,000 information pamphlets across 12 provinces most affected by the outbreaks. Nonetheless, the review

has concluded that to sustain the behaviour change and make a significant impact in reducing the public's exposure risks to H5N1, more regular and large-scale communication efforts are needed.

With the support from the global chemical company DuPont, the PMI has successfully completed its pilot biosecurity project in chicken farming areas in Jakarta and South Sulawesi and plans to transfer such projects in other areas of the country. It also has integrated, where feasible, such biosecurity components into its existing water and sanitation projects in the communities.

#### **Lao Red Cross**

The Lao Red Cross plans to increase awareness of backyard farmers and general community about avian influenza, develop its organizational capacity of public education programmes and prepare for health emergencies.

#### **Malaysian Red Crescent Society**

At its annual council meeting in March 2006, the national society conducted an orientation on avian influenza prevention and preparedness for its branch representatives.

#### **Myanmar Red Cross Society**

The Myanmar Red Cross Society has conducted a technical inter-agency meeting to develop behavior change and communication material for its avian influenza public education initiatives. Following the confirmed cases of H5N1 in the province of Mandalay on 9 March, the national society urgently called in internal coordination meeting and decided to distribute some 2,000 personal protective items to its branches.

#### **Philippine National Red Cross**

The Philippine National Red Cross's emergency response to the recent massive landslides in the Southern Philippines caused some delays in the planned avian influenza prevention and preparedness activities. However, the national society recognizes the urgency of its actions in this regard. Starting from early April 2006, it will launch a nationwide public education campaign in twenty selected locations, which are considered by the national government as avian influenza "hot spots", thus complimenting government actions at the local level.

#### **Singapore Red Cross Society**

Through its website, the national society conducts public education on avian influenza prevention and it is in the progress of preparing and placing online guidelines for the public on how to wear masks in the case of outbreaks. More than 90 per cent of frontline staff working at the Red Cross home for the disabled has been immunized with the normal flu vaccine. The Singapore Red Cross Society has formed a task force and each divisional manager is looking into formulating guidelines and standard operations procedure to prepare for the pandemic.

#### **Timor-Leste Red Cross Society**

The Timor-Leste Red Cross Society or Cruz Vermelha de Timor Leste (CVTL) plans to integrate prevention messages in its community-based health education programme active in eight districts (60 per cent of all districts). It is an active member of the non-governmental organizations' coordination forum for avian influenza. The national government, jointly with the forum members, is planning to launch a massive vaccination campaign against Newcastle disease in the coming months. Recognizing that this campaign's target population is the same for avian influenza public education (rural dwellers with backyard farms), the CVTL plans to capitalize on this initiative and mobilize its volunteers to spread simple avian influenza prevention messages.

With the recent development of avian influenza national plan, the national society plans to activate its dialogue with the public authorities to clarify its response role in pandemic situation, in order to be able to prepare for it adequately.

#### **Viet Nam Red Cross**

As the country hardest hit by avian influenza outbreaks, the Viet Nam Red Cross (VNRC) appealed to the international community for urgent assistance and received funds from the Federation to initiate immediate response. It also received funds from the German Red Cross. These funds will enable the national society to immediately launch a nationwide public education campaign with key hygiene and avian influenza prevention messages and mobilize its volunteers. Given the past surges of cases of avian flu infections around major public

holidays in the country, the Viet Nam Red Cross plans to time the campaigns around the forthcoming holidays like Victory Day (30 April) and Labour May Day (1 May).

### **South Asia**

With the impending threat of avian influenza pandemic, the regional health unit of the South Asia regional delegation, has promoted the issue in the region and has encouraged the national societies to prepare volunteer mobilization and public awareness campaigns and to coordinate with the government in their respective countries. A survey of the plans and activities by the national societies, governments and other relevant agencies in the region has been carried out. All six national societies in the region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) have received information and guidelines prepared at the Secretariat; in addition, a frequently asked questions (FAQ) sheet, prepared at the regional health unit, has been sent to the national societies.

National societies are closely following up the national plan in their respective countries, and the national societies of Afghanistan, India and Nepal in particular have already started preparing in the event of emergency. Afghanistan Red Crescent and Nepal Red Cross have conducted workshops to train their staff and volunteers, while Indian Red Cross has responded with public awareness campaigns in the affected and neighbouring districts after the recent outbreak of bird flu. Only Bangladesh Red Crescent Society has no reports on avian influenza activities available at this time.

The regional health unit will continue to function as a link with the Federation Secretariat in avian influenza preparedness and to provide technical support in planning.

#### **Afghan Red Crescent Society**

The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) leadership is committed to addressing the issue, and the ARCS health director is member of the ministry of public health task force. Currently, ARCS does not have a role in risk assessment or surveillance. There is good dialogue and communication with the Federation Secretariat (including the regional delegation) as part of its ongoing support to the ARCS health programme. Avian flu activities will be integrated into other areas of the national society's work.

ARCS has not yet conducted awareness raising sessions with its national headquarters personnel, but has made available copies of WHO's pandemic preparedness plan. Educational communication materials approved by the ministry of public health will be developed. In the meantime, the ARCS' network of health facilities will be used to implement avian flu activities. Plans are in place mobilize and train volunteers. The national headquarters will be coordinating with the branches on future plans, and would welcome technical and financial support for preparedness plans.

The ministry of public health, in cooperation with WHO and other agencies, have developed a strategic plan for Afghanistan, concentrating on developing a surveillance system, guidelines for prevention (early awareness), a fact sheet, the development of information, education and communication (IEC) materials, the provision of vaccines and provision of preventive equipments for high-risk groups. The ARCS will have a relevant role within its role as auxiliary health service provider to the ministry of public health.

#### **Indian Red Cross Society**

The Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) has been engaging in preparedness activities since November 2005. The President of India has constituted a task force with the secretaries from various ministries along with representatives from WHO. The national society has a clear role in the government plans and has discussed with the government regarding prevention, preparedness and response activities.

The potential scale of an avian influenza pandemic in India is massive and would require all agencies working in coordination. Accordingly, IRCS is working in close cooperation with the ministry of health and is targeting its efforts on public awareness and preventative measures. The IRCS network of over 700 branches and a strong volunteer base means it can play a significant role in assisting government efforts. The IRCS plan is based on:

- Enhancing inter-sectoral coordination
- Strategies for effective communication
- Identification of interventions for preparedness and response phase and implementation at the appropriate time

- Conducting simulation exercises and drills
- Strengthening public health infrastructure, surveillance and lab diagnosis

Specific activities include:

- Orienting volunteers through Red Cross branches on avian influenza risks and appropriate behavior
- Increasing awareness of one million members and volunteers on frequently asked question and 'dos and don'ts'
- Identification of suspected human cases by volunteers and appropriate referrals to hospital/dispensaries
- Training of human as well as animal health workers on steps to prevent avian flu.
- Alerting concerned communities and authorities
- Non-pharmaceutical interventions such as like hand washing, use of masks, care of suspected human cases.
- Dissemination of avian influenza information
- Preparation for provision of psycho-social relief and counseling for families of infected persons should there be human cases.
- Assist in the implementation of government actions relating to dealing with the outbreak.

In response to the infections found in Maharashtra, a member of the state disaster response team was sent within 24 hours of the communication received by the Maharashtra state branch. The district branch of Dhule (the nearest active district branch to Nandurbar) and the Maharashtra state branch have been carrying out awareness campaigns. The campaigns consist of information about the virus, its prevention, educating the population on how to approach the authorities in case they found dead birds, and steps to take in the case of an outbreak. Hoardings (billboards) have been put up, and pamphlets and booklets have been distributed. The campaign by Maharashtra state branch was undertaken with the help of five teams covering 143 villages, with a government representative who speaks the local tribal language.

The Jalgaon district branch is conducting a similar campaign, printing 10,000 pamphlets and 13,000 booklets, some distributed at bus stations in order to cover as wide a geographical area as possible. The branch has also been carrying out door-to-door visits, and had covered about 100 villages by 20 March. The local government representative is working closely with the IRCS. Government vehicles have also been touring the district with the Red Cross banners.

The IRCS headquarters is checking the stock and availability of Oseltamivir medicine through chemists and government agencies. The IRCS headquarters will be printing 500,000 brochures in ten regional languages for poultry owners, the general public and health workers. In addition, training for 100 volunteers is being proposed by the national headquarters to be carried out in ten districts of the ten states most at risk. In relation to activities mentioned above, the Irish Red Cross and German Red Cross are committing funds to support the national society.

### **Nepal Red Cross Society**

The Nepal Red Cross (NRCS) leadership is committed to addressing the issue and the society is developing a contingency plan. Similarly, the society has been undertaking various responsibilities that are assigned to it by the government task force. Public health in emergencies is a priority area in the NRCS health policy.

The issue was discussed in the fortnightly coordination management meeting between NRCS, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Federation, and NRCS has been in close contact with the South Asia regional delegation. The Federation representative and programme directors of NRCS participated in a meeting with the focal point at the ministry of health.

Although the government of Nepal has declared that there are no cases of avian influenza in Nepal, it has highlighted the possibility of an outbreak through migrating birds as well as through imported birds and bird products. There are limited human vaccines in Nepal. Nevertheless, the government has developed a national preparedness and response plan and formulated a task force comprised of representatives of concerned governmental, non-governmental and UN agencies, with advice from medical experts. The Nepal Red Cross also has a designated role in the plan to increase community awareness through preventative messages and aid in surveillance activities by mobilizing its volunteers.

In the meantime, WHO provides technical support to the epidemiology and disease control division of the Nepalese government, in addition to being represented in the task force. The WHO is also acquiring protective devices (masks, gloves, goggles) for those professionals who would be working in high risk environments.

### **Pakistan Red Crescent Society**

Avian flu awareness activities have been integrated into the community health prevention activities undertaken by the mobile health teams in the earthquake affected areas. The national headquarters are exploring how best to link with the ministry of health regarding how the PRCS can best contribute to the national response. The ministry of health has just completed its national plan on dealing with avian flu, supported by the WHO.

### **Sri Lanka Red Cross Society**

The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) has a preparedness plan. Its current and planned activities consist of increasing awareness of health department personnel and technical committee members, producing a news update every month and making Oseltamivir medicine available. Efforts had been held back by the lack of communication from the government and competing priorities with ongoing tsunami reconstruction and recovery work.

There is a government country plan in place, but it currently does not foresee a role for the Sri Lanka Red Cross. However, SLRCS has had discussions with the government regarding its role in prevention and response preparedness activities.

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