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Welcome Address

Adriaan van der Meer

Executive Director

International Science and Technology Centre, Moscow

at the occasion of the

EU-CIS Seminar

“New Trends in Infectious Diseases”

26 – 27 November 2008

Mercure Grand-Hotel Saxe Lafayette, Lyon, France

Dear Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you at the EU-CIS seminar on “New Trends in Infectious Diseases” on behalf of the International Science and Technology Center in Moscow (ISTC). I also extend to you a special welcome from Andrew Hood, the executive director of our co-organizing, sister organization from Kiev, the Science and Technology Center Ukraine (STCU), who is represented by Michel Zayet at this seminar.

I especially would like to thank our hosts and co-organizers Professor André Syrota, and his team from Inserm, for their scientific, organizational and financial support. And, I would like to thank the European Commission for the continued support and commitment that they are providing and have provided to the mission of both the ISTC and STCU over the last 15 years.

I am grateful that today’s seminar could be organized within the framework of the French Presidency of the European Union, which is promoting international scientific cooperation. Both centers have a similar mission to promote multi-lateral scientific cooperation between States of the former Soviet Union and the EU, but also other member states to our agreements, such the Canada, Japan, Norway, Republic of Korea and the USA.

Multilateral Scientific Cooperation

This seminar is indeed an excellent example of international scientific cooperation. It brings together many scientists from different countries on a multilateral basis.

It is clear that the global problems of today such as global warming or the emergence of drug-resistant infectious diseases can only be solved through greater cooperation by scientists worldwide. Science in isolation can no longer be successful. This was understood from the beginning when the Centers started their work. Therefore, obligatory international collaboration is one of the main eligibility criteria for project funding from ISTC or STCU. In addition, our international workshop and mobility programs continue to support this exchange of scientific information through international, scientific research cooperation.

ISTC has been in existence for almost 15 years, funding a broad range of scientific topics under which the Bio/Lifesciences area. To date, ISTC has funded over 600 projects in the Bio/Lifesciences research sphere for about 220 million USD at about 400 institutes, covering the areas of:

- Epidemiology and disease surveillance of infectious diseases;
- Diagnostics and Detection;
- Drug design and development;
- Vaccine development
- Biodiversity;
- Bioremediation;
- Biosafety and biosecurity;
- Agriculture;
- Genomics, Proteomics & Bioinformatics

Because of the great interest from our funding parties, but also international collaborators in our projects, ISTC has developed several initiatives in the field of bio/lifesciences field.

Biological Threat Reduction Initiative (which includes Disease Surveillance)

Many of the highly infectious diseases in the world are endemic in parts of the former Soviet Union. In addition, due to the developments in the early nineties the capacity of the existing systems of disease surveillance was reduced. Therefore, this new ISTC initiative will support:

- Upgrading of disease surveillance (some of which will be discussed later this afternoon during Session 1 and tomorrow's sessions);
- Characterization of existing libraries of infectious diseases, using modern methodologies;
- Improvement of biosafety and biosecurity of facilities that have libraries of infectious diseases or work with them;
- Training of the scientists who work with infectious diseases to international standards.

In short this Biological Threat Reduction Initiative deals mainly with the protection of libraries and surveillance of infectious disease or prevention of incidents with a bio-agent (either intentionally or accidentally).

Counter Bio-terrorism Initiative

In addition to this 'preventive' initiative, other activities are needed that deal with detection and response, which are the main objectives of our Counter Bio-terrorism Initiative. Based on analysis and consultations with experts in the field, ISTC formulated an Initiative that is aimed at developing:

- New techniques and technologies for the rapid detection and/or diagnosis of (highly) dangerous microorganisms. One of the first steps in preventing incidents is to have a reliable detection system in place. However, if an incident occurs, then it is also essential to be able to quickly, reliably and cheaply determine to what kind of agent an individual is exposed to. Therefore, there is a need for robust and reliable field diagnostic kits, as well as high throughput clinical diagnostics;
- New diagnostics for food supplies to detect dangerous bio-agents, as well as measures to protect the food supply chain, which is one of the G-8 priorities. The food supply chain is inherently vulnerable to non-state actors because of the many different stages and actors involved. Additionally, an incident of contamination with a bio-agent of food will have great effects on the general population, as well as significant economical impact;
- Emergency planning, reporting, first response, and epidemiological analysis after the event of an incident or outbreak.

So far I have talked about our activities in prevention, surveillance, detection, diagnostics, and response planning. However, we also have a drug design and development initiative.

Drug Design and Development Initiative

The Drug Design and Development Initiative, which is a partnership effort to promote the development of novel therapeutics to combat emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases and cancer. The main goals of this initiative are to:

- Support innovative medicine research and development;
- Enhance preclinical development and production capacities;
- Foster self-sustaining relationships;
- Support international collaboration, and provide market promotion;
- Generate sustainable civilian employment opportunities for ISTC beneficiaries.

This initiative is focused on where we can support the pipeline of drug development (up to the pre-clinical stage), strongly encouraging commercialization and sustainability efforts of our beneficiary institute.

I would like to invite all present today to join us in this important work in facing these global challenges. In our view, there is a key role here for the private sector. Our private partner programs allow private companies to become a partner of ISTC and STCU free of charge. Working with the ISTC

and STCU has many advantages such almost 15 years' experience in matchmaking. There are also financial advantages that apply to our projects in the sphere of taxation.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Problems, such as drug-resistance and newly emerging infectious diseases, are worldwide problems. Bacteria and viruses do not carry passports. I am sure that you agree with me that multilateral, scientific cooperation is the only way forward to addressing these kinds of trans- boundary problems. Therefore, I trust that this seminar will further contribute to the solution of problems that are a concern for us all. I thank you for your attention.