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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**WEST AFRICA: WORKSHOP ON PREPAREDNESS FOR AVIAN FLU
PANDEMIC**

(Bamako, Mali: 19 June 2007): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in West Africa is holding a workshop on humanitarian response preparedness for an avian influenza pandemic, from 19 to 21 June 2007, in Bamako, Mali.

In Africa, more than elsewhere in the world, the means available for containing the disease's spread in poultry is limited by weak health systems, lack of financial resources and insufficient technical capacity. "Preparing to contain this disease rapidly is high priority for human, economic and social security in West African communities," said Hervé Ludovic de Lys, OCHA's Regional Director for West Africa.

Since the first cases of avian influenza emerged in Africa (in Nigeria in 2006), concerned governmental authorities -- conscious that the current situation constitutes a real health problem, and eventually one of public security -- have undertaken a number of actions in response to the challenge.

Poultry and poultry products are important components of the basic diet in a number of African countries today. In the case of a pandemic, people would have to find other sources of protein, which would mean a loss of income for stock keepers, a rapid increase in prices, and population movements toward safer areas. Thus, improved epidemiological surveillance, rapid diagnostics, an increasingly risk-sensitized population, and behavioural changes are essential for a good response.

The Bamako workshop, which has brought together 14 countries, regional organizations, and civil society representatives, as well as United Nations agencies and their partners, is the second in a series. The first workshop, aimed at English-speaking countries, was held in Accra, Ghana from 12 to 14 June 2007. Participants will review their respective levels of preparation (follow-up and evaluation), conduct a simulation exercise using the contingency plans developed by United Nations country teams, and work to improve interaction with national institutions and civil society organizations in the areas of information management and coordination for the promotion of a rapid, effective response in the case of an epidemic.

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