

Press release no.: 120202_PR1202
02 February 2012

Knowing the unknown ***Using scenarios for pandemic preparedness***

"Preparedness by critical sectors of the society is the key to minimise the negative effects of a future major health emergency across the society" stressed Mr. Martin Seychell, Deputy Director General of the Directorate General for Health and Consumers, European Commission. Welcoming ASEF's commitment in strengthening Europe-Asia public health cooperation, Mr Seychell mentioned, "The European Union is committed to improve international collaboration to tackle serious cross-border health threats."

Mr Seychell was the Guest of Honour for the ASEF Public Briefing "Asia and Europe: are we prepared for future pandemics?" organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) Public Health Network at the Renaissance Brussels Hotel in Belgium this morning.

The Network funded by the Government of Japan is a platform to encourage public health dialogue between Asia and Europe. "ASEF Public Health Network is one of the two components of Japan's ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza" noted Ms Hiromi Kakuta from the Ministry of Japan, during her welcome speech. "The other component is Stockpile Project of anti-viral drugs for five hundred thousand people," she added.

The introductory remarks were followed by the presentation of three animated videos on scenarios for pandemic preparedness and a panel discussion.

Prof. Dr. Jürgen Graf, Director of Medical Service, Lufthansa, who was one of the panellists at the Briefing, shared his experience in using the scenarios to strengthen preparedness in air transport passenger services. According to Prof. Dr. Graf, "imagining possible futures is important to facilitate effective pandemic preparedness programmes in the air transport sector. It helps in business continuity management in the interest of both, the sector and the community at large."

The ASEF-ASAP scenarios were developed by the ASEF Public Health Network over a series of workshops in 2010. They cover a range of possibilities to prepare for future pandemics and public health emergencies in Asia and Europe. Prof. Marc Van Ranst, one of the facilitators for the development of ASEF-ASAP scenarios, also shared his views during the Briefing this morning as one of the invited panellists. He said: "During a crisis, it is important to continuously tailor your actions with constantly evolving situations. A range of different scenarios allows you to seamlessly switch from one scenario to another. This operational agility is a key factor to an appropriate crisis response." Prof. Van Ranst was the crisis manager for the Belgian government during the H1N1 pandemic outbreak in 2009.

Underlining the need for scenarios in pandemic preparedness, ASEF Director for Intellectual Exchange, Ms Sol Iglesias, emphasised: "Public-private partnership is a key to effective planning to prepare for future pandemics. The development of the ASEF-ASAP scenarios is an outcome of such a partnership."

Representatives from the UN bodies, international organisations, academia and the media participated in the programme.

This event is the European launch of the ASEF-ASAP scenarios that were first unveiled for public use in Bangkok last year. ASEF Public Health Network encourages individuals and organisations across Asia and Europe to use these scenarios to develop effective, long-term, multi-sectoral strategies for pandemic preparedness and response.

About ASEF Public Health Network

The Network is a part of the Initiative of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) on the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza, which was established in May 2009 during the 9th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

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About the Organisation:



The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) promotes greater mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Through ASEF, civil society concerns are included as a vital component of deliberations of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM*). ASEF was established in February 1997 by the participating governments of ASEM and has since implemented over 450 projects, engaging over 15,000 direct participants as well as reaching out to a much wider audience in Asia and Europe. www.asef.org

* ASEM now brings together 46 member states (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Laos, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, Vietnam) plus the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat. www.aseminfoboard.org