



Closing speech

Chantal de Singly Director General of ARS OI

The first international forum on health monitoring is an absolute success. For the first time, it helped to gather in one place, here in Reunion Island, professionals and high-level experts from the health monitoring vector control and research from 20 different countries, in order to discuss about their practices and experiences of health threats that affect populations.

Health issues specific to our climate and our geographical situation are common points that bring our three regions together.

If the island can be an advantage in terms of geographic protection against emerging diseases, it can also be a disadvantage an issue when diseases will enter an area, due to a weak immune system and response capabilities often limited.

This is why the health monitoring systems of our territories must be efficient and reactive to quickly detect unusual situations and implement all appropriate management measures, with a common goal: to protect the health of our populations. But as Mike Ryan of the School of Public Health of Dublin said, do not forget that during epidemics, health care facilities are particularly impacted and face not only the care of patients, but also apply the measures hygiene for the protection of caregivers and patients.

During these 3 days, the exchanges were rich and various subjects were approached. A few examples are:

- Monitoring through tools using new technologies: monitoring via SMS to Madagascar, laboratory networks in Africa, computer applications used in large gathering of people in the Seychelles and New Caledonia, the network OSCOUR in the Reunion island...

- Also note an innovative experience in Reunion Island placing the population as a performer for her health surveillance.
- Finally, the important role of laboratories in the confirmation of diagnosis with the involvement of quality control, support reference centres and the use of new methods of sample transport by the use of blotters.

Particular attention has been paid to the vector-borne diseases, real public health threat that we all share. Mosquitoes constantly adapt to changing environments and strategy display, which involves developing new and more innovative technologies response. That is why the response to the vector risk was largely addressed through different aspects of vector control:

- Control strategies are now undergoing a revolution and the situation is now shared by all who the need to gradually learn to use insecticides in a more targeted way;
- Research programs currently have great potential and should continue to be supported. This is particularly true for the sterile insect technique currently developed in the Reunion island and the Indian Ocean and whose first tests show very encouraging results;
- One of the most important advances is probably the development of programs to distribute long-lasting Insecticide-treated mosquito nets in our territories that have in recent years, a significant reduction of malaria cases;
- Finally, once again it was demonstrated that the importance of community mobilization programs in the fight against vectors, combines more conventional techniques entomologists to those of the social sciences and communication.

Emerging risk was one of the leading threats of the three-day forum, illustrated by a series of pathogens unknown by many of us, but yet well known diseases by our islands but which probably far underestimated the magnitude. This is the case for leptospirosis for example, that has been demonstrated in this forum that this was a truly major public health issue for our territories.

70 oral presentations and 60 posters were presented the opportunity to discuss all the fields of health surveillance (surveillance, investigation), but also

the response and taking into account that our insularity that often make the more complicated exercise.

One of the lessons of this forum is probably the importance to closer the fields of health surveillance, investigation and response. Networks that have been presented have shown how we were able to strengthen our capacity to monitor the health of our populations to identify very early any potential health threat. They now also help our territories to prepare and organize their response capacity. This can be done by establishing response plans (such as those presented for dengue and chikungunya in the French West Indies and Reunion), but also by identifying expertise within networks mobilized to any time to help our territories to deal with an epidemic episode.

It is now necessary that these exchanges continue, that these experiences are declined, adapted and enriched in our different regions so that we progress together face to emerging diseases and the threats that we have and we have to face.

We owe it to our populations; this is our challenge for the future...

Jean Claude de l'Estrac

Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission

Madame De Singly, you just gave us a very positive assessment of this first International Forum.

Our islands are vulnerable. The risk that we incur at the spread of an epidemic in our island territories is considerable. The introduction of an emerging disease in our islands could have disastrous consequences. Indeed, the impact of an outbreak on the tourism economy – which most of the islands strongly depend on – perhaps more important than the impact on the health of populations. The crisis of chikungunya in 2006 whose negative effects on tourism are still felt today in 2013 is proof.

We must act, prevent and bring our knowledge together. This meeting of experts that the Agence de Santé Océan Indien (ARS), the Institute for Public Health and the IOC organized – with the support of the French Development Agency – fits perfectly in the context of the main mission of IOC: regional solidarity. Alone, none of our islands could resist against the health threat. Surveillance and response preparedness must be coordinated. This is the purpose of this Forum.

Your work has borne fruit. The exchanges have helped bring out concrete proposals for action, and here are five actions from the recommendations of this Forum:

- **Giving the current health alerts (such as coronavirus and avian influenza), mobilize within existing networks the expertise to assess the risks and prepare response**

This forum has identified great skills among the three territories represented. The monitoring networks that exist in the regions represented today can now use these skills.

Identification of these resources can now create expert groups on specific topics, in order to submit opinions to the leaders, develop a monitoring strategy and thus prevent the emergence of diseases and, as appropriate, prepare the countries to answer.

For example, the news shows that the risk of introduction of coronavirus and avian influenza is real. The existence of this group will prepare the region for the response if this possibility becomes a reality.

At the beginning of this summer, a meeting of experts and professionals from the region will be organized to provide a monitoring and response to the risk posed by coronavirus.

- **Build on existing networks to continue and expand the Health Surveillance inter-island and for the sharing and exchange of information becoming a permanent and systematic within and between networks.**

Existing networks in the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean will go one step further by creating a network.

This networking of networks and their interaction will be done through a systematic exchange of information and good practices. Transparency and communication will reduce the risk of epidemics.

Specifically, there will be a systematic exchange and transmission to all networks watch bulletins and alerts. Then, the exchange of best practices will lead inevitably to the use of common tools.

- **Innovating Health Monitoring by the use of new technologies by all stakeholders, including the public**

New technologies are particularly suited to the island, many solutions based on information technology and communications were presented and passed during this Forum.

On the one hand, the exchange between networks on the success of certain technologies facilitate their transfer and adaptation in other networks.

On the other hand, mobile technologies will enable the individual to be an actor of his own health. The individual may, for example, broadcast an “alert” via SMS to health professionals, photographing an insect vector and disseminate its photo to professionals, install an application on his smartphone, etc.

- **From technical cooperation to political cooperation**

The successful technical cooperation within the network SEGA encourages us to achieve strong political cooperation. At IOC, we have a duty to gather around the same table the health ministers, policymakers and donors.

This policy cooperation is needed to change the governance response to epidemics and health issues, and to adapt the regulatory and legislative frameworks in order to make more effective and efficient control.

- **Prepare already the second International Forum**

Indeed, given the success and positive outcomes of the 1st Forum, we can only continue to do so. I am very pleased to announce that the organization of the Second International Forum in 2015 is already in preparation.

Preliminary discussions between the IOC, the South Pacific Community (SPC), the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and networks have taken place.

The South Pacific Community could be a candidate for the organization of the Pacific Forum in 2015.

2012 has been, as you named the "Spring virus". Globalization is also a health risks. Faced with this, our mission of protecting populations leads us to find solutions. Communication between professionals and health experts is one, necessary and indispensable fact. But this communication should extend the circle of professionals and also reach out for the people and politics. The five projects that I have presented to you will help us all to achieve this goal and together we can respond to these health risks.