EFFORT TO IMPROVE BORDER SAFETY

To help prevent violent incidents, the Secretary of Governance of Mexico, Carlos Abascal and the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff and Eduardo Medina-Mora, Mexican Secretary of Public Safety, have endorsed a multi-step plan for bi-national coordination during emergency situations. The plan lays out a commitment to ensure immediate communications and information sharing between responsible authorities during emergency situations that may have cross border complications. The Action Plan also lays out the groundwork for ensuring coordinated investigations and detentions of persons believed to be involved with violent activity.

“Criminal networks operating at the border are increasingly emboldened and represent alarming risks to our security and public safety. Their lawlessness is intolerable, and together we will confront them with the full force of the law,” said Secretary Chertoff. “We are pledging swift and aggressive action to combat violent criminal activity at the border, and we’ll continue to share critical information to target and dismantle these dangerous criminal networks.”

In addition, both nations will continue to coordinate border security efforts such as patrolling the border region, conducting regular exercise to ensure updated and consistent protocols and identifying common landmarks so the first responders can quickly arrive at the scene.

“Being good neighbors starts at the border. With these agreements on border security and public safety we strengthen our bridges of understanding and cooperation,” said Secretary Abascal. “We are aware that facing violence and crime, there are no magic overnight solutions, but we are convinced that binational systematic efforts are the best we can do to have better results.” (Source: Federal Emergency Management Association press release, March 3, 2006.)

H5N1 AVIAN FLU VIRUS VACCINE INDUCES IMMUNE RESPONSES IN HEALTHY ADULTS

Preliminary results from a study funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) demonstrate that high doses of an experimental H5N1 avian influenza vaccine can induce immune responses in healthy adults. “These findings represent an important step forward in the nation’s efforts to prepare for the possible emergence of a human pandemic of H5N1 avian influenza,” notes NIH Director Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D.

The potential for a human avian flu pandemic looms large, say experts, as daily reports indicate an increasing spread of infection in bird populations in Southeast Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. According to the World Health Organization, as of March 24, 2006, 186 people had been infected with avian flu viruses, and more than half of them had died. “We are working hard to address the many challenges that remain with regard to the development of an H5N1 vaccine,” adds NIAID Director Anthony S. Fauci, M.D. “For example, potentially protective immune responses were seen most frequently at the highest dose of this vaccine. We are investigating other options that may allow us to reduce the dosage—for example, adding an immune booster, or adjuvant, to the vaccine—so we can achieve a more practical immunization strategy.”

Generally, flu viruses are easily transmitted from person to person, but so far, the H5N1 avian influenza viruses have not demonstrated this characteristic. In the worst-case scenario, if an avian flu virus became easily transmissible from person to person, it could trigger an influenza pandemic because humans have no pre-existing immunity to these viruses. For more information go to www.nih.com. (Source: US Department of Health and Human Services press release, March 29, 2006.)