

Philippines

News report (February 2009)

Manila and Tagbilaran

On 8–14 February, Dr Meslin met with officials from the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture of the Ministry of Health of the Philippines and representatives from the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office and the WHO Country Office involved in implementing the joint WHO/Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation project on elimination of human and dog rabies in the Visayas archipelago. Dr Meslin also visited one site in the project area (Bohol Province), accompanied by the Gates Foundation representative (Dr Anastasia Pantelias).

Discussions focused on three issues: the development of the project proposal; the "paradigm shift" strategy selected for the project; and modalities for the project's implementation. Rabies is one of the five priority communicable diseases of the Ministry of Health, and the proposed strategy is fully in line with that of the national rabies control programme. Such a long-term strategy would limit the chances of rabies re-emerging, as previously observed in parts of the Philippines. All participants agreed that a strategy aimed at protecting human health by controlling the disease in its animal reservoir was the right way to deal with the problem in the Philippines and in Asia as a whole.

WHO (Headquarters, Regional and Country Offices) confirmed its support to the Department of Health and its willingness to assist in project implementation.



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On 10–12 February, a field trip was organized to Bohol Island, where activities to control rabies are community based and focused on long-term dog population management by promoting responsible dog ownership. The overall rate of vaccination coverage reached by the Bohol project launched in mid-2007 was around 44% by the end of 2008. Recognizing that immunization is the most cost-effective single intervention to control and eliminate human rabies within an acceptable time-span, the project manager has taken a number of steps to improve coverage, which represent important modifications to the original strategy by: (i) increasing the number of vaccinators, (b) using mobile vaccination teams to provide dog vaccination services at the hamlet level, (c) initiating a dog registration and fee collection service for life instead of annually. The Governor of Bohol Province is highly supportive of the rabies control programme, which he considers an important contribution to the island's health, economic and touristic development.

