

Speech by the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries,

Ms. Tina Joemat-Pettersson at the World Veterinary Congress

11 October 2011, Cape Town

Programme Director

President of the World Veterinary Association

Director General of the OIE

Chief Veterinary Officer of the FAO

Director of Food Safety and Zoonoses (FOS) of the WHO

Presidents of Veterinary Associations

Deans of Veterinary Faculties

Registrars of Veterinary Regulatory Authorities

Invited Guests and Dignitaries

Ladies and Gentlemen

Members of the Media

The year 2011 has been declared World Veterinary Year as the Veterinary fraternity celebrates its 250th anniversary. South Africa is proud to be part of this global celebration by hosting the 30th World Veterinary Congress, and is particularly honoured to be the first to host this August congress in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Veterinary science in South Africa dates back to approximately the period 1874 to 1876, with the appointment of the first Colonial Veterinary Surgeons within South Africa. Until then, the veterinary profession was unknown in the country. Dr. Jotello Soga was the first South African to qualify as a veterinarian in 1886 at the University of Edinburgh. He returned to South Africa to do research on animal diseases in the Eastern Cape Border region. He was the son of a Xhosa missionary, Tiyo Soga, the first black South African to be ordained as a minister who translated the Gospel into Xhosa.

During 1891, Dr Arnold Theiler, a young Swiss veterinarian, arrived in Pretoria. Upon his arrival there were no facilities for research within Pretoria. As a state veterinarian, Dr. Arnold Theiler established a research institute to produce vaccines and to conduct research at a site in Daspoort, near Pretoria.

In 1896, the disease, Rinderpest, swept through South Africa, destroying over half of the country's livestock population and almost 95% of the country's cattle herds within two years. Rinderpest was the worst animal disease pandemic which South Africa has ever experienced and it was the impetus which stimulated the beginning of professionally based veterinary research in South Africa. 2011 therefore calls for further celebration as the World Organisation for Animal Health (also known as the OIE) has declared the global eradication of Rinderpest.

In March 1898, Dr. Arnold Theiler was appointed as Director of the Bacterial Institute at Daspoort. Despite the very inadequate facilities consisting of wood and iron buildings and stables, an enormous amount of valuable research work was produced at Daspoort.

When this facility became unsuitable in 1905, Theiler was instrumental in establishing the Onderstepoort Veterinary Research Institute in Onderstepoort in 1908. This world-class facility still serves as a national centre for the investigation, diagnosis and prevention of the spread of animal diseases.

Theiler made astonishing progress and successfully diagnosed and combated many diseases. One of his many achievements was his diagnosis of the East Coast Fever; the organism causing this tick-borne disease - *Theileria parva* - was aptly named after him.

In 1968 a dedicated vaccine production facility was established, and in 1992, Onderstepoort Biological Products (OBP) and the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute (OVI) were separated. The OVI then became one of the research institutes of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC).

Programme Director, South Africa has a proud history in the Veterinary fraternity. Despite our history that sought to suppress blacks in general and women in particular, the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA) produced the first black woman veterinarian, Dr Kgabi Mogajane, in 1987. She served as the deputy director-general in our national department until recently when she took up the post of Head of Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the North West province. Fortunately, she is not lost to government.

During 2006, continuous professional development was instituted as a legal requirement for veterinarians registered with the South African Veterinary Council, as knowledge not only empowers, but also results in confidence, satisfaction and pride in the daily fulfillment of a veterinarian's tasks.

In South Africa, animals are of greater value than just being a food source, as they play a very important role in the South African culture. Cattle are seen as a status symbol and wealth is measured by the number of cattle you own. When a man wants to get married, "Lobola", which is a form of compensation paid in cattle, is paid towards the prospective wife's family out of gratitude for her upbringing. "Braai" – or the grilling of meat on open flames is also one of the traditional ways in which South Africans socialise. The health of our animals is therefore a great priority, and veterinarians, whether state, private or industry, play a very important role in ensuring that South Africans have access to this very important protein source and building block of our cultures.

An evolution over the 250 years into a modern veterinarian with greater and far more reaching responsibilities than just animal health and welfare justifies the celebration of the 250th year of veterinary education and the contribution that this profession has made and continues to offer to humankind.

Aquaculture is the fastest growing food production sector in the world, and, as it continues to grow, a decreasing percentage of food fish and other aquatic animals will be provided from the already heavily exploited natural resources. The fast growth of aquaculture worldwide is a result of intensification of production methods, and the resultant improvement of the efficiency of breeding and growing fish, lobsters, molluscs, and other highly-valued aquatic food species.

The aquaculture sector finds itself confronted with problems similar to those known from the intensive and growing agricultural industry. As is the case with terrestrial farming, intensification of animal production leads to the emergence of diseases.

The number of aquaculture facilities in South Africa is increasing, but there is limited capacity for service provision, surveillance of prevalence and intensity of pathogens, and support of this growing industry. In particular, there is a growing need for the training of practicing veterinarians, state veterinarians, and fish farmers. Veterinarians trained in fish health management will be required to oversee farming operations, to advise farmers on production methods, and to survey and control notifiable diseases.

May the theme for this 30th World Veterinary Congress, namely "CARING FOR ANIMALS: HEALTHY COMMUNITIES" create a platform where the profession shares its knowledge in order to further promote the profession and its ability to equally serve man and animals.

May each delegate also find the time to explore this beautiful City, Cape Town, also known as the Mother City, and enjoy the famous hospitality for which South Africans are renowned.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I do hereby declare the 30th World Veterinary Congress of the World Veterinary Association, hosted by the South African Veterinary Association, officially OPEN!

