

For Immediate Release

## **As the International Consortium on Anti-Virals symposium opens today, animal protection groups call for:**

- ✓ **preventive measures to combat viruses**
- ✓ **research into cause of pandemic diseases**
- ✓ **caution in funding fear-driven research**
- ✓ **public funds to go to public health agencies with a broader public mandate, preventive programmes and no profit motive**

**Why are animal protection groups interested in this conference?  
Because heightened and irrational fear of pandemic diseases  
have serious negative impacts on domestic animals, wildlife, the  
environment and, as Dr. Marc Siegel points out, also on humans.**

Toronto, September 24, 2005: Coincident with the release of Dr. Marc Siegel's newest book, *False Alarm, The Truth About the Epidemic of Fear*, the International Consortium on Anti-Virals (ICAV), Trent University in Peterborough, an institution with virtually no track record in this field, begins a public symposium and scientific workshop to discuss "the urgent need and will for a global solution to emerging pandemic disease."

In a review of Dr. Siegel's book, David Corn, Washington Editor of *The Nation* writes, "Most importantly, Siegel exposes how government officials, the media, and the pharmaceutical industry exploit--and spread--fear for profit and power."

The ICAV's press releases aptly demonstrate the premise of Dr. Siegel's book. The September 15 ICAV media release titled – **Bird Flu is Just the Beginning ... International Scientists gather at Trent University to Combat Global Pandemic** leave the public and government with the impression that a pandemic is imminent and inevitable.

However, no real evidence is produced by ICAV to back the assertion and to justify enormous expenditures of public research dollars to combat the mythical enemy.

In the September 15 press release, ICAV states, "The threat of pandemic influenza or the emergence of other viral disease outbreaks can not be predicted with any temporal certainty. Avian or bird flu is just the beginning of a call to action."

This assertion is challenged by Dr. Marc Siegel in an editorial released across North America and is available on line. In it, Dr. Siegel states, "The avian flu virus, or H5N1, has killed millions of birds in China and Russia, either directly or because they've been destroyed to prevent its spread. The virus has infected around 112 humans, fewer than 60 of whom have died. Despite the small numbers, public health...and the media have

loudly sounded the alarm: Avian influenza is about to transform into a massive human killer that could kill 50 million to 100 million people.”

Dr. Siegel continues, “Yet the science behind all the worry is questionable. It rests on the unproven claim that avian flu will develop exactly like the strain that caused the flu pandemic of 1918...The current bird flu however, has a different molecular structure than the 1918 bug. And though it has infected millions of birds, there is no direct evidence that it is about to mutate into a form that would transmit from human to human. In isolated cases food handlers in Asia have gotten sick, but that doesn’t mean that a wildly lethal mutation is about to occur.”

“We know that avian flu and SARS can largely be prevented,” said Liz White, Director of Animal Alliance of Canada. “Animal husbandry practices both in animal markets where SARS got its foothold and in intensive chicken and turkey agricultural operations where avian flu outbreaks occur are considered the cause. Instead of spending money to change agricultural practices to prevent a pandemic, we frighten people about a possible pandemic and then contribute millions of tax dollars to the private sector to develop a treatment.”

Barry MacKay, Canadian representative for the Animal Protection Institute has had years of experience dealing with people’s fears of wildlife and diseases such as rabies and West Nile Virus. “Frequently I have conversations with people who express irrational fears towards animals. West Nile Virus is a case in point. The fear of being bitten by an infected mosquito propels government agencies to spray with Malathion and other extremely dangerous pesticides – dangerous to human and animal health and the environment.”

“As a wildlife rehabilitator and someone who has handled rabies vector species, I am very familiar with the fear-mongering that affects both humans and wildlife,” said Donna DuBreuil, spokesperson for the Ontario Wildlife Coalition. “Most troubling is the expenditure of public dollars researching wildlife diseases. For example, the DNA cluster project, the precursor to the International Consortium has received public funds to research raccoon rabies even though it is the rarest wildlife disease in North America to affect humans. And now, in its press release, the ICAV states it will require ‘an investment of \$70 million over seven years’ for what many see as dubious research that will divert badly-needed public funds from critical health care and environmental needs. Money for these ventures often comes from government foundations where there are no provisions for performance audits.”

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