

Opening Remarks – M. Ellis

1st IFBA International Conference on “Global Biosafety and Biosecurity: Taking Action”

February 15, 2011

Bangkok, Thailand

Permanent Secretary, Distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the IFBA’s international conference “*Global Biosafety and Biosecurity: Taking Action*”...and the launch of *2011 The Year of Building International Biosafety Communities*.

The presence here today of the Permanent Secretary of the Thailand Ministry of Public Health, Dr. Pajit Warachit, does a great honor to the International Federation of Biosafety Associations. Your presence here, Permanent Secretary, shows the importance and significance which the Government of Thailand attaches to biosafety, the subject of this conference. Thank you for inviting us to this wonderful city and for being with us this morning.

Among the other dignitaries honoring this conference, I would mention Willy Tonui, President of the African Biosafety Association and my co-chair here at the IFBA. A very warm welcome also to the Presidents of our member Biosafety Associations who have travelled from all regions to participate in this important event, including ...the Asia-Pacific regional association, the European Biosafety Association, Pakistan, Philippines, Georgia, Central Asia, Brazil, Australia, Korea, the Caribbean region, Morocco, Canada, the US, Japan and Mexico. Unfortunately, our colleagues from the Egyptian Biosafety Association are not with us this week and we wish them well during this challenging time.

Later this week, during our conference dinner, we will have the privilege of meeting with Dr. David Heymann, a world champion in fighting the spread of infectious diseases.

I would also like to particularly recognize RADM Craig Vanderwagen. His presence with us, comes as a clear recognition of the growing role biosafety plays on the world’s public health security stage, making the conference all the more important.

When we first founded the IFBA in 2001, I called for a coordinated international response to meet the biosafety needs of our colleagues in resource limited countries around the world. I am pleased to announce that today...10 years later... we have grown into an active and vibrant global biosafety community, with over 50 member organizations from every corner of the world.

But there is still much work to be done. Having seen the conditions in which many of our colleagues are working in Central and South East Asia and other regions, I have nothing but admiration for their efforts and I have learned a lot about biosafety from them.

It's time their efforts were met with the kind of *comprehensive* and *collaborative* international support that's needed to really improve biosafety practices, and in-turn, strengthen national public and animal health systems.

This is why the IFBA and Griffin Foundation are undertaking a new initiative called *2011 – The Year of Building International Biosafety Communities*. The aim of this initiative is to

- respond to an *explosion of global interest* in biosafety by supporting the growth of new and emerging biosafety associations worldwide, and
- to empower these associations with the resources and tools they need to develop in a focused, meaningful and sustainable way.

Achieving these objectives will enable us to build significant and lasting *improvements* to biosafety while raising the *profile* and *effectiveness* of biosafety at a crucial point in its global development.

Take a minute to look around the room. The presence of such a diverse group gathered here in Bangkok....biosafety professionals, governments, policy makers, scientists, civil society, private industry, academia, and funding agencies...from all regions of the world...shows what an incredible opportunity we have this week to transform the face of global biosafety and biosecurity.

Ask yourselves.....What is our collective image of the future 12 months from now... 12 years from now?

- A biosafety cabinet that is properly functioning and certified in every laboratory...
- a trained biosafety practitioner at every institute that is given the necessary support and resources to achieve results...
- national guidelines and policies that are practical and applicable at the local level...
- a coordinated donor community working together to leverage scarce resources...
- thriving biosafety associations in all countries and regions of the world

A big part of our work here in Bangkok will be to ensure we develop a common understanding of the problems to be solved... and strategic priority issues to be addressed... in order to achieve this shared vision for the future, 12 months and 12 years from now.

How successful will we be? It depends on our willingness to actively participate in the discussions and working sessions over the next three days... to work hard...to think not only outside the box, but push far beyond the box. I believe the ultimate key to our success is "buy-in" from talented and energetic individuals like you.

I'm counting on each of you to work with us to develop a comprehensive outcomes document for the Year of Building International Biosafety Communities...as well as a clear action plan going forward...a plan that lays out what we want to have accomplished together at the conclusion of this special Year.

Here, I want to reiterate the IFBA's commitment to working with all of you to bring innovative ideas forward...to collaborate on key issues...and to look for new and better ways to address the interests of all stakeholders.

At the end of the day, this conference is really about all of us in the biosafety community deciding to "become" the change we want to see. And this is what the Year of Building International Biosafety Communities is all about.

Overview of Agenda

As I mentioned to you in my opening remarks, by bringing together a diverse global biosafety community here this week in Bangkok, we have been given a unique opportunity to collectively shape our future. We are represented here by international organizations, policy makers, the donor community, scientists, biosafety professionals, governments, academics, private industry and many other stakeholders who share the goal of advancing biosafety and biosecurity.

This conference is not just 3 days of presentations and discussion, but three days in which like-minded individuals come together to share their passion for international biosafety issues and work together to advance global biosafety and biosecurity.

To this end, the scientific program committee has developed an agenda that facilitates dialogue, a sharing of innovative ideas and fruitful debate. Through a series of platform presentations, open discussions and working sessions,

- we will articulate our shared goals and vision for the future
- we will define the gaps and priority needs
- and we will chart a course to collectively build sustainable biosafety and biosecurity capacity

All conference delegates will be participating in the open discussions scheduled at the end of today and tomorrow. Each table will be provided with a series of questions intended to guide the discussion and stimulate dialogue. Today we will

focus on identifying the gaps and challenges, while tomorrow's discussion centers around the resources and tools to address priority needs.

On Thursday morning, we will all break into 3 separate working sessions. These sessions will challenge delegates to broaden their horizons as they come together to solve biosafety issues affecting our global community, despite their differences...and this is the essence of what the IFBA is all about. The outcomes you produce from each of the working sessions will form the basis of our collective action plan moving forward. If you have not already done so, we ask you to please sign up for one of the sessions at the registration desk.

The local arrangements committee, under the leadership of Dr. Barbara Johnson has also provided for a diverse array of social events in which delegates can interact with one another. A special thanks to Dr. Stuart Blacksell and his team of volunteers from the Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit... and to the Biosafety and Biosecurity Network of Thailand for jointly working with the local arrangements committee and organizing this event with us.

We also thank our sponsors, Canada's Global Partnership Program, the US Biosecurity Engagement Program, US Biological Threat Reduction Program, Sandia National Laboratories, the Asia-Pacific Biosafety Association, the European Biosafety Association, the American Biological Safety Association, Germfree, ESCO, Nuaire and Biosafety Biosecurity International.

So the time for our collective action is now. Whether you are new to the field or an experienced biosafety professional, a policy maker or a bench scientist...I am confident that you will take up this task and succeed in charting the course towards a successful *Year of Growing International Biosafety Communities*.