2 November 2011, Hyderabad, India

Commissioner and Government Officers, Senior Officials of Hyderabad, Presidents, Board and Committee members of WEVA and The Indian Association of Equine Practitioners (IAEP) and Conference attendees I am truly delighted to be here with you all today.

I am especially pleased that the President Professor Tim Greet and the board of WEVA, acting with the President of IAEP Dr Kunchur has asked me to speak during this important year for the Veterinary Profession and an especially important year for all equine vets.

250 years ago the government of France, was advised that a veterinary School should be founded in Lyon, and that the director should be a famous horseman of the day, Claude Bourgelat who was also Commissioner General of the Royal Horsebreeding Establishments.

The events that have been organised around the world this year for World Veterinary Year have highlighted and celebrated a profession that has worked to improve animal and human health.

They have shown the crucial role veterinarians play in biomedical research, reducing global hunger, monitoring food quality and safety and protecting the environment. It is with great respect that I stand here today in the heart of India as the President of the FEI, the world governing body of equestrian sport, to address a meeting of equine experts assembled from all parts of the world.

In parallel to the changes that have occurred within the veterinary profession, we have seen developments in communications, in science, in art, in transport and we have seen our world shrink as a result of globalisation.

Those changes are happening now at the fastest pace and with the greatest focus here in the East. The Western world may have been hit by financial crisis, but here in India there is talk of growth of between 8 and 10% per cent.

The veterinary profession has clearly changed enormously over two and half centuries. In its early years the horse was a bearer of goods, a method of transport and a tool of warfare. It is still used that way in many parts of the world, especially for transport, but its use in sport is an extraordinary success story.

Everywhere I go, whether it be to developed or emerging nations, there is an explosion in equestrian sport as people discover that “extraordinary something” that is the partnership with the horse in competition. But it is really a re-discovery of an old and deep partnership. A partnership that as the world develops faster and faster, reminds us of the importance of staying close to nature, to respect it and to be its protector.
And as the next generation faces the reality of climate change and dwindling resources there is very much to be learned from the harmony with nature that the horse constantly teaches us.

As the profession looks out onto the next 250 years let me give you my three personal perspectives:

- As an individual rider and owner
- As member of what is called the equine industry
- As the President of the FEI and member of the IOC

As a rider and owner, I am grateful for the efforts this profession makes to raise the level of care of horses. The barriers keep falling and knowledge continues to emerge. I am certain that equine vets will always continue to adopt new technology and undertake the future research that is necessary.

The individual horse relies on us as carers in its time of need, and on a one-to-one basis the profession has always been ready to meet that need. We - the owners and riders - trust you with our hopes and passion – but remember that as with all trust, it must always be earned.

As we compete, we trust you as a key part of our support “team”. Most importantly, we trust you to make decisions that will always protect the integrity and image of the sport. The absolute importance of the support “teams” that riders depend on is now fully recognised under FEI rules. Persons held responsible for actions that are against the values of our sport, can now include anyone in that team and no longer just the rider.

As a member of what is called the equine industry, I am aware that this extraordinarily valuable and expanding equine industry is producing millions of jobs and revenue. Vets have an enormous task to protect it. We need vets to work hard at ensuring that disease outbreaks do not disrupt and destroy businesses and that necessary vaccines and medicines are developed. We need vets to work with and within governments to make sure that the welfare of the horse is NOT subservient to commercial pressures, but is protected in a practical manner.

Very importantly we need vets to ensure that when horses are rightly protected by laws and regulations, such as those needed to allow the safe international movement of horses, that it is done with courage, taking a real risk-based approach and without over- precautionary levels of red tape and restrictions.

Please understand me - restrictions are necessary – animal production industries and food chains must have them to stay secure. But we need veterinary policy makers who can see that sport horses at the peak of their fitness are in a unique risk category and it is not logic to apply a one size fits all approach. Such an approach is unfortunately seen too often and it is recognised as one of the greatest barriers to the development of the sport. One of my main mandates from the National Federations of the FEI is to bring about a more rational approach to the International Movement of Horses - as a priority.
Here - going forward into what we now call our “globalised” future - I see that all the efforts needed must be much more interlinked, and much less fragmented. The responsibility of leading that protection best rests with the veterinary profession.

As the President of the FEI leading both the top and the development levels of equestrian sport - an Olympic sport that partners the human athlete with an animal - vets are one of the key groups to maintain the true ideals of our sport with its passion and heroes – both human and equine.

It is very clear now that the East has come of age and that it is finding its one way in all areas, no longer looking west for innovation or guidance.

We are seeing that happen within equestrian sport as well. As that continues, then equestrian sport in the East may well have a different cultural look or popularity of certain disciplines - but there is one thing that can never be compromised on and that is ensuring the welfare and health of the horse must be at its heart. It is very clearly to the veterinary profession that we look in order to achieve that.

As part of the Olympic Movement, the FEI upholds the values of universality – that is ensuring accessibility to competition, of excellence, respect and friendship.

Excellence is needed at all times in how we treat and manage the horse in sport – it is a duty. Respect for the principles of fair play, of ensuring that horses competing are fit to do so – and are not "quickly fixed" to do so. Any sport must be conducted with integrity and fairness, otherwise it is no longer sport - and in horse sport there must be integrity and fairness at all times in how we treat the horse. There is no better way to show what being a vet really stands for than by being the protector of that integrity and maintaining fairness to the horse. We need many such vets in all continents as equine sport continues its rapid increase in popularity. And those vets must have the moral courage to lead that fairness and integrity, and set an example to others.

With regard to the Olympic value of friendship, it is important that vets in sport do not join a competition against one another. Simply, they must form a community that is united in approach, with a common purpose and a sense of urgency - to do the right thing for the horse. If that challenge is not met, then others may step in and claim to take on that task. They might be much less well equipped, and therefore not best placed or qualified to serve the horse.

So here is my message for the next phase of the Veterinary Profession – the care of the individual is not in doubt. The challenge is to better serve the wider community by leading, by taking courageous and sometimes difficult decisions while ensuring that our horses, our industry, our sport, our food supplies and the future scientific breakthroughs needed by all of the world are protected in all ways.

I wish you a very successful conference. The programme is vast and the knowledge huge – there are after all 250 years behind it. I must also draw your
attention to the FEI session all day tomorrow – “The Horse, the Veterinary Profession and Equestrianism” - designed to contribute to your celebration.

Enjoy incredible India - she will always be exotic, but she is also a very serious individual.

As the representative here of the horse owners, an industry and of a huge sport I would like you to take home the knowledge that we have very high and serious expectations of you.

Thank you