



**MESSAGE FROM HRH PRINCESS HAYA FOR OIE/FEI MEETING ON THE
MOVEMENT OF HORSES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

The Meydan, Dubai (UAE), 29 September 2014

**Sheikh Khaled Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa (BRN), FEI Regional Chairman for Group VII, introduction: "Her Royal Highness Princess Haya has expressed her regret at not being able to attend this important meeting and has given me the honour, as Chair of FEI Group VII which encompasses the Middle East and North Africa, of reading to you her opening address".*

START OF OPENING ADDRESS from HRH Princess Haya

Senior officials, Delegates of the OIE, and representatives of the National Equestrian Federations and National Horseracing Authorities of the Middle East and North Africa,

I very much regret not being able to be with you all today.

Let me begin by warmly welcoming you to my home, the great city of Dubai, for this important meeting. I am delighted to have you all here.

I fully believe in the OIE's work to ensure a fair and consistent approach to animal health and providing solutions to many of the great challenges we face. The work the OIE carries out on behalf of the World Trade Organisation offering guidance on the trade and movement of live animals in a FAIR, SAFE, and EFFICIENT way is essential.

So, when I became an OIE Goodwill Ambassador, I was thrilled to be more involved in promoting the organisation's objectives.

As a member of the International Olympic Committee and President of the FEI, the world governing body of equestrian sport, I am very familiar with how sport can teach us the values of FAIRNESS, CONSISTENCY, and SAFETY.

Equestrian sport - and the horse industry that supports it - is undergoing a huge expansion all over the globe. We have seen this happening especially in Asia, the Americas and also here in the Middle East and North Africa. Across this region there has been huge investment in equine facilities for both racing and equestrian sport – just look around you at the Meydan complex which places the horse at the heart of all its activities – as well as the many other large equestrian developments across the Middle East, which I encourage you to visit.

With this growth has come job opportunities and tax revenues, as well as a strengthening of the rural economy and its social fabric. The number of FEI international equestrian events has increased by more than 45 per cent since 2007 and this growth is continuing.

Every five horses create at least one job and we know that here in Dubai alone, many thousands of families derive their incomes from work related to equestrian sport.

Some of the world's most valuable and supervised horses compete for the biggest prizes on the planet here in this region.

The Asian Games 2014 – which are taking place at the moment in Incheon in the Republic of Korea - are bringing together a large number of nations from the Middle East and Asia to compete under the values of sporting harmony. Their motto "Diversity Shines" is particularly relevant, as these Games will see twice as many nations competing in equestrian disciplines compared to 2010, a clear reflection of the growth and expansion of the sport in this region.

And, we know it's only a matter of time before the Olympic Games are hosted in the Middle Eastern region.

However, international equestrian sport will not and cannot take place without the temporary importation of "high-health, high-performance horses" across borders. At present, the approach to moving these horses between the countries in the region has been extremely disharmonised. It is an approach that does not take into account the lower disease risk they present, or their high level of supervision. To compete to the best of their abilities, these sport horses simply must be kept healthy and free from disease.

The current approach to the international movement of sport horses is not able to cope with the explosion that has taken place in the sport, making it very challenging for event organisers to budget and plan effectively. It is difficult for your athletes to compete on equal terms with other nations in the region or to qualify for future Olympics or championships. In addition, your own wider equine industry cannot fully reap the benefits of a strong sports sector, especially the large economy linked to horse sport.

In view of what is at stake at the top level of horse sport, the industry has a good understanding of the need to protect itself from disease threats. The FEI and the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities - the IFHA - have long-established requirements for identification, traceability, health and vaccination - through their regulations - to protect the health and welfare of horses that have reached a high level in the sport. By coming together to form the International Horse Sports Confederation (IHSC), both organisations aim to ensure that a united approach is adopted.

The OIE and its member nations have now fully understood that a reassessment is necessary to best accommodate the "high-health, high-performance horses". In May this year, the OIE General Session voted unanimously in favour of recognising the need for the concept, called the "HHP" horse, and the principles around how such horses would constitute a "sub-population" amongst other types of horses.

This week's gathering of senior officials - such as yourselves - is perhaps the most important meeting on this subject that has ever been held in this region. Its single objective is to create a better approach to the temporary movement of high-performance horses that is in line with the established OIE principles and the acknowledgement that they present a lower risk to the importing and exporting countries. This approach must be transparent, consistent, fair, efficient and safe.

I congratulate and thank the OIE - as well as its member countries - for taking action and bringing you all together to find a solution to this very real problem. I thank you all for coming here with open minds to allow the continued growth of the equine industry, and providing the clear guidance needed for these special horses.

Change is taking place in both the old and the new worlds, and particularly here in the Middle East and North Africa. We must be aware that improvements are possible. In all areas, we must work together - to make sure that we all agree on the changes to be made.

I send you my very best wishes for a successful conclusion to this important meeting. I also extend my gratitude to Meydan and the Government of the United Arab Emirates for hosting this event. We all hope - that with your experience and your recognition of the need for a more practical approach, and alongside the guidance of the OIE - you will leave here ready and equipped to make the changes that are truly necessary.

END OF OPENING ADDRESS from HRH Princess Haya