

## **PETA warns of deadly link between Factory-Farm Filth and Bird Flu**

*Group Blames Tripura Government's Failure to Maintain Basic Standards on Poultry Farms for Bird Flu Outbreak*

Mumbai, Maharashtra, May 7, 2008 /[India PRwire](#)/ -- In the midst of the most severe avian flu outbreak to date, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals India (PETA) released graphic undercover video footage of crowded and filthy conditions on chicken and egg factory farms, which leading health experts – including those at the United Nations – blame for the spread of the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu. The report documents the scalding, starvation and mutilation of birds as well as the potential for the spread of disease from chickens to humans. **The disturbing findings were sent to the Tripura government last year, and the government was warned about how unsanitary conditions on factory farms could lead to an outbreak of the deadly H5N1 virus.**

PETA's report reveals how unhygienic conditions are responsible for the repeated outbreak of bird flu in India.

In 2005, approximately 2 billion chickens were slaughtered in India. Chickens are crammed by the tens of thousands into dark, filthy sheds, where the ammonia from the birds' accumulated waste actually burns their eyes. According to Dr. Vandana Shiva, chickens used for meat are pushed to reach their slaughter weights in just 40-42 days. Typically, the birds' legs, hearts and lungs fail to keep pace with their rapidly growing bodies, which lead to serious problems, such as congestive heart failure and ascites – a pooling of body fluids in the abdomen. The birds' legs are so severely crippled that the birds are unable to reach food and water. During transportation to slaughter – which involves long, gruelling rides in all weather extremes – the birds' bones are frequently broken. After the long trip, the chickens are rapidly shackled and hung by their legs on conveyors in mechanised slaughterhouses. Many are scalded to death in defeathering tanks while still conscious. At small butcher shops, chickens' throats are cut on floors or butchers' blocks in unhygienic conditions while other birds watch.

Life for hens used for egg production is equally miserable. Millions of hens spend their entire lives confined to tiny battery cages in huge factory warehouses, which contain as many as 1,500 to 2,000 cages. Each cage holds six to seven birds, who are packed together so tightly that they cannot even stretch a wing. Nine-day-old chicks' sensitive beaks are cut off with a searing blade in a process called "debeaking". Stress and constant rubbing against the wire cages cause hens to lose their feathers, and their bodies become covered with bruises, abrasions and boils.

Because of the filthy and cramped conditions that chickens raised for meat and eggs are forced to endure, disease is rampant. On its website, the Environmental Defense Fund explains that "[a]ntibiotics are routinely fed to healthy livestock and poultry to make them gain weight faster and to compensate for unsanitary living conditions". According to researcher Malati Puranik, who conducted a study of chickens sold in Mumbai, "[W]e realised that poultry sold under such unhygienic conditions is a serious health hazard. Pathogens such as campylobacter and salmonella proliferate, causing severe bacterial contamination". During the evisceration process, chicken carcasses easily become contaminated with faecal material when the intestines are cut or torn and the contents leak out during extraction.

Unhygienic conditions on factory farms lead to outbreaks of bird flu. In 2007, Indian health officials confirmed a bird flu outbreak among poultry in the north-eastern state of Manipur. According to the World Health Organisation, out of the 342 registered cases of the H5N1 strain of bird flu, 211 people have died in 13 countries. Factory farms provide the perfect environment for the virus to strike. Because of the intense confinement of the animals, the deadly virus could spread like wildfire. Bird flu can be caught by humans who handle infected birds, and experts fear that the virus will eventually mutate into a form that is transmissible from human to human, setting off a catastrophic worldwide pandemic. Five people have been found to have bird flu symptoms in India. Recurrent outbreak of bird flu is a waste of public money. According to Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss, the Indian government paid more than \$19, 47,619 as compensation for poultry and feed in 2006, and more than \$2, 23,810 was paid for birds culled in the 2007 outbreak.

In its report, PETA suggests that the welfare standards recommended by the UK's Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) should be used as the basic guidelines for the treatment of chickens in the poultry industry. Chickens die to provide the industry with huge profits, and PETA suggests that the industry owes the animals at least basic humane treatment in return.

"The government cannot wash their hands of this by blaming the Bangladesh government for the outbreak of bird flu when conditions in their own poultry farms are conducive to the outbreak of the same deadly virus. Had the government been proactive in taking appropriate measures, the pandemic could have been averted", said PETA Campaigns Coordinator Nikunj Sharma. "Chickens are social, feeling birds who deserve respect. The poultry industry must ensure the immediate implementation of at least these simple welfare standards to improve the lives of the birds."

Copies of the full 40-page report and last year's letter to the Tripura government along with a Right to Information Act Application seeking information from government on action taken on our letter and a copy of the reminder letter sent to the government are enclosed. For more information, please visit [PETAIndia.com](http://PETAIndia.com).

#### **Notes to Editor**

We are an Animal Rights Organisation based in Mumbai in India.

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