



Consulat général de France à New York

Speech by the Consul general of France in New York
Mr. Philippe Lalliot

Conference@934: Contagion, from Fiction to Reality
Monday, October 31, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

I am very pleased to welcome you to the 22nd edition of Conferences@934. Our last conference on the Iranian nuclear threat, which some of you may have attended, enjoyed great success and was mentioned in the French, American, Israeli and Russian media.

We chose an entirely different, yet as fascinating, topic for tonight.

AIDS, SARS, H1N1, Mad Cow Disease, Bird Flu, E-Coli... So many epidemics have been making the headlines for more than 20 years now. One thing is certain: as it was a ship from Damascus which brought the Great Plague of 1720 to Marseille, diseases today spread much more rapidly, due to globalization of exchanges. At the same time, medical research and epidemical surveillance methods have greatly advanced to counter the threat.

Our own French *Institut Pasteur*, with its international network of over 30 laboratories spanning all five continents, is at the forefront of combating contagious diseases and pandemic threats around the world. When the H1N1 pandemic hit in 2009, for example, the *Institut Pasteur* worked around the clock to develop a diagnostic tool to identify the virus. The very next day, these kits were sent to its international network to help identify the spread of the H1N1 virus. We have with us tonight François Maisonrouge who is the new vice-chairman of the Pasteur Foundation and I hope François will join the conversation during the Q&A session to tell us more about the *Institut Pasteur* and its achievements.

The recent movie *Contagion's* success – highly recommended if you have not yet seen it – can be explained not only by Marion Cotillard, Matt Damon and Laurence Fishburne's acting, but also by the concerns raised in public opinion due to increase in the number of these epidemics. We ask ourselves numerous questions: Are we exposed to, and at risk of a great pandemic such as the Spanish Flu which killed several dozen million people in 1918? Are we truly prepared for a pandemic? How can we protect ourselves without falling into panic and paranoia? How can we avoid a rigorous application of the precautionary principle from going too far?

Dear Friends,

We are fortunate to have with us tonight two distinguished specialists who will provide us with some answers to these issues. I shall present them to you in a few words.

Dr. García-Sastre is a Professor at the Department of Microbiology and Co-Director of the Emerging Pathogens Institute at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. For the past 15 years, Doctor, your research focused on the molecular biology of influenza viruses, among others. As the author of some one hundred publications and reviews, you are one of the founding members of the Center for Research on Influenza Pathogenesis. You are the leader of the basic research component on Viral Therapeutics and Pathogenesis of the North East Biodefense Center proposal, which involves the collaboration of more than 20 academic institutions in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey.

Professor Bruno Chomel is a specialist on Population Health and Reproduction at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. Your research is focused on cat scratch disease and Bartonella infections in domestic animals and wildlife, the epidemiology of rabies, plague and zoonosis of wildlife. You were the Director of the World Health Organization/Pan American Health Organization Collaborating Center on New and Emerging Zoonosis from 1997 to 2009. You are the Director of the Master of Preventive Veterinary Medicine at UC-Davis, as well as co-Editor-in-Chief of Veterinary Research since 2002, writing and co-writing more than 170 peer-reviewed publications.

As it is our custom, each speaker will take the stand for 15 minutes. These introductions will be followed by a half hour session of Q and A. We shall finish at 7:45 p.m., pursuing our conversation over drinks. I wish to remind you that you may find the photos, video and audio recording of these conferences on our website the following day.

With no further delays, I hand the microphone over to Dr. García-Sastre. Excellente soirée à toutes et à tous./.