

August 17, 2020

Submitted via electronic mail

Mr. Thomas Storch
Senior Trade Advisor
National Economic Council
Room 235
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20502

Re: COVID-19: Health risks and wildlife trade – the need for a permanent global ban on wild animal markets and a precautionary approach to the wildlife trade.

Dear Mr. Storch:

We, the undersigned organizations based in the United States and representing more than 10 million supporters, acknowledge this most difficult time for our country. As we work as a nation to contain and combat the spread of COVID-19, we urge you to do all that is within your power and authority to prevent a crisis like this from ever happening again.

Global and national action to curb the wildlife trade is one of the most effective strategies to prevent future pandemics, and is necessary to reduce animal suffering and protect biodiversity.

We therefore call upon you to support and champion a permanent ban on wild animal markets,¹ which could become sources for future pandemics, and to commit to end international trade in wild animals and their products, which contributes to the spread of zoonotic diseases, at the G20 Leaders' Summit this November.

The impact of COVID-19 in regard to the loss of human life, physical and mental health, the global economy, livelihoods, and quality of life has been utterly devastating and cannot be underestimated. To date, COVID-19 has led to 20 million confirmed cases and 744,385 deaths across more than 200 countries and territories.² According to calculations by the United Nations and others, the COVID-19 pandemic could cost the global economy between USD 8.5 – 15.8 trillion and is triggering a global recession, forcing the introduction of costly stimulus packages.^{3 4}

The costs to the international community and governments of fighting a global pandemic are vastly higher than the costs of preventing it in the first place. According to Dobson et al. (2020), the cost of reducing

¹ We define wild animals as non-domesticated species captured from the wild or bred in captivity, particularly mammals and birds, as these animals have been the sources of past zoonotic outbreaks. We define the wild animal trade as the legal and illegal commerce of such live wild animals, as well as of their parts and derivatives. We are not advocating for restrictions on local community subsistence use of wild animals, parts and products, or the movement of animals for non-commercial trade (e.g., conservation, sanctuaries).

² World Health Organization Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) situation reports. Situation Report 190. Updated on August 13, 2020. Available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200813-covid-19-sitrep-206.pdf?sfvrsn=bf38f66b_6

³ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "COVID-19 to slash global economic output by \$8.5 trillion over next two years." 13 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/policy/wesp-mid-2020-report.html>.

further pandemic risk over the next decade by protecting wildlife and forests would equate to just 2 percent of the estimated financial damage caused by COVID-19.⁴

The UN Secretary General's report, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, highlighted that "robust and comprehensive environmental policies addressing priority transboundary issues may prevent and mitigate future pandemics, simultaneously banning trade of wildlife (which can contribute to health risks), harmonizing sanitary standards and addressing the interacting threats due to illegal trade, habitat loss, climate change, and different sources of pollution by developing collaborative policy frameworks."⁵

The demand for wild animals and wild animal products is a primary cause of the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases and represents a severe risk to global health. Millions of wild animals are captured, bred and traded every year across the globe for food, traditional medicine and pets.⁶ Zoonotic disease can emerge or be spread at every stage of the trade.⁷ Reducing the risk of zoonotic spillover events from wild animals to people requires maintaining wild animals in secure and intact wild habitats and minimizing wild animal-human interaction, including by severely limiting the use and trade of wild animals, particularly for sale as luxury meats in large urban wildlife markets.^{8 9}

At wild animal markets, the combination of a diverse assemblage of live, wild animals, domestic animals, animal carcasses, the presence of blood and other bodily fluids, including urine and excrement, as well as unsanitary conditions, creates an ideal environment for the transmission of zoonotic pathogens among animals and from animals to people.¹⁰ The stress experienced by live animals in such environments enhances transmission risk by making the animals more susceptible to disease and more likely to shed dangerous pathogens.¹¹

It is widely acknowledged that a wildlife market in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China played a significant role in the COVID-19 outbreak.¹² This market had a section that reportedly sold many live and dead wild

⁴ Dobson, A.P., Pimm, S.L., Hannah, L., Kaufman, L. Ahumada, J.A., Ando, A.W., et al. 2020. Ecology and economics for pandemic prevention. *Science* 369, 379-381. Available at: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/369/6502/379>.

⁵ United Nations. 2020. *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>.

⁶ Scheffers, B.R., Oliveira, B.F., Lamb, L., and Edwards, D.P. 2019. Global wildlife trade across the tree of life. *Science*, 366, 71-76.

⁷ Swift, L., Hunter, P.R., Lees, A.C., and Bell, D.J. 2007. Wildlife trade and the emergence of infectious disease. *EcoHealth*. 4, 25-30. DOI: 10.1007/s10393-006-0076-y. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10393-006-0076-y>.

⁸ Karesh, W. B., Cook, R. A., Bennett, E. L., & Newcomb, J. (2005). Wildlife trade and global disease emergence. *Emerging infectious diseases*, 11(7), 1000; World Wide Fund for Nature. 2020. COVID-19 Urgent Call to Protect People and Nature. Available at: <https://www.worldwildlife.org/publications/covid19-urgent-call-to-protect-people-and-nature>.

⁹ Evans, T., Olson, S., Watson, J., Gruetzmacher, K., Pruvot, M., Jupiter, S., Wang, S., Clements, T., and Jung, K. 2020. Links between ecological integrity, emerging infectious diseases originating from wildlife, and other aspects of human health - an overview of the literature. *Wildlife Conservation Society*. Available at: https://c532f75abb9c1c021b8c-e46e473f8aad72cf2a8ea564b4e6a76.ssl.cf5.rackcdn.com/2020/05/22/8zqrkmzuna_Links_between_ecological_integrity_and_EIDs_originating_from_wildlife.pdf.

¹⁰ Woo, P.C.Y., Lau, S.K.P., and Yuen, K. 2006. Infectious diseases emergency from Chinese wet-markets: zoonotic origins of severe respiratory viral infections. *Current Opinion in Infectious Diseases*. 19, 401-407. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7141584/pdf/coidi-19-401.pdf>.

¹¹ Hing, S., Narayan, E.J., Thompson, R.C.A. and Godfrey, S.S. 2016. The relationship between physiological stress and wildlife disease: consequences for health and conservation. *Wildlife Research*, 43 (1) 51-60. Available at: <https://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/30933/1/relationship-between-physiological-stress-and-wildlife-disease.pdf>

¹² Shereen, M.A., Khan, S., Kazmi, A., Bashir, N. and Siddique, R., 2020. COVID-19 infection: origin, transmission, and characteristics of human coronaviruses. *Journal of Advanced Research* 24, 91-98. Available at: <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S2090123220300540?token=12AF2B827A3E3100724075F18D6A84F67889358FE4541C28CC5ACD28E6261135A1255B5C71620CAE57842E244BCE5366>

animals including snakes, hedgehogs, crocodiles, and raccoon dogs.^{13 14} Scientists are still investigating how the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) was transmitted to humans, but research suggests it may have been transferred from bats via pangolins or some other intermediate host species.¹⁵

This is not the first time that infectious zoonotic diseases have been linked to wild animals. Between 2002 and 2003, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, caused by a coronavirus which is also believed to have emerged from wildlife markets in China, resulted in more than 8,000 human cases across 29 countries and 774 deaths.¹⁶ Failure to enact permanent bans on all wildlife markets at that time allowed for the similar, but more severe, COVID-19 to emerge or rapidly spread to people. Other significant zoonotic diseases, including Ebola, Monkey Pox, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, HIV/AIDS, and avian influenza,¹⁷ are fundamentally linked to our poor treatment and exploitation of wild animals and our encroachment on their habitats.

Zoonotic diseases are responsible for over two billion cases of human illness and over two million human deaths each year.¹⁸ Sixty percent of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic and more than 70% of these are thought to originate from wild animals.¹⁹ Considering the significance of wild animals as a reservoir of emerging infectious diseases, their exploitation, including through international trade, must be of primary concern.

As highlighted in the [G20 Health Ministers'](#) communique issued following the virtual summit on 19 April 2020, it is crucial to take action to improve pandemic preparedness. While a robust global response is critical in detecting, treating, and reducing transmission of the current outbreak, it is essential to take vital measures to prevent similar emerging infectious diseases from developing into pandemics, with the associated threats to human life, and social and economic well-being.

Because the United States is one of the world's leading importers of wildlife — importing more than 224 million live animals and 883 million other wildlife specimens every year²⁰ — it has the responsibility to assume a leadership role in making sure the G20 takes decisive action to prevent future pandemics by committing to end the international trade in wild animals and wild animal products.

The majority of Americans want to see their government do all that it can to prevent the next pandemic. The most effective pandemic prevention strategy is to address the root of this current crisis, which is the

¹³ Ralph, R., Lew, J., Zeng, T., Francis, M., Xue, B., Roux, M., Ostadgavahi, A.T., Rubino, S., Dawe, N.J., Al-Ahdal, M.N., Kelvin, D.J., Richardson, C.D., Kindrachuk, J., Falzarano, D., and Kelvin, A.A. 2020. 2019-nCoV (Wuhan virus), a novel Coronavirus: Human-to-human transmission, travel-related cases, and vaccine readiness. *Journal of Infection in Developing Countries* 14(1):3-17. doi:10.3855/jidc.12425. Available at: <https://jidc.org/index.php/journal/article/view/32088679/2181>.

¹⁴ McNeil, S and C. Choi. "Virus renews safety concerns about slaughtering wild animals." Associated Press. 16 February 2020. Available at: <https://apnews.com/caa64052d429b2b0fa56b1d5caeab99b>.

¹⁵ Andersen, K.G., Rambaut, A., Lipkin, W.I., Holmes, E.C. and Garry, R.F. et al. 2020. The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2. *Nature Medicine* 26, 450-452. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9.pdf>.

¹⁶ World Health Organization. Summary of probable SARS cases with onset of illness from 1 November 2002 to 31 July 2003. Available at: https://www.who.int/csr/sars/country/table2004_04_21/en/.

¹⁷ Alves, R. R. N., & da Silva Policarpo, I. 2018. Animals and human health: where do they meet? In *Ethnozoology* (pp. 233-259). Academic Press. Available at: <https://europepmc.org/backend/ptpmcrender.fcgi?accid=PMC7150316&blobtype=pdf>.

¹⁸ Grace, D., Mutua, F., Ochurch, P., Kruska, R., Jones, K.E., Brierley, L., Lapar, L.A., Said, M., Herrero, M., Pham-Duc, P., Tao, N.E., Akuku, I., and Ogotu, F.O. 2012. Mapping of poverty and likely zoonoses hotspots. Zoonoses Project 4. Report to the UK Department for International Development. Available at: https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/21161/ZooMap_July2012_final.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y

¹⁹ Jones, K.E., Patel, N.G., Levy, M.A., Storeygard, A., Balk, D., Gittleman, A.L., and Daszak, P. 2008. Global trends in emerging infectious diseases. *Nature* 451, 991-993. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature06536>.

²⁰ Center for Biological Diversity and Natural Resources Defense Council. END WILDLIFE TRADE: An Action Plan To Prevent Future Pandemics. May 2020. Available at: <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/end-wildlife-trade-202005.pdf>.

exploitation and trade in wild animals and the destruction of their habitat. We look forward to working with you on this critically important issue.

Yours sincerely,

The undersigned organizations...

World Animal Protection

Center for Biological Diversity

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

The Animal Welfare Institute

The Humane Society of the United States

People for the Ethical treatment of Animals (PETA)

Harvard Animal Law & Policy Clinic

Compassion In World Farming

Animal Legal Defense Fund

Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS)

International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute

Defenders of Wildlife

Brighter Green

Animals Are Sentient Beings

Unexpected Wildlife Refuge

Save Wolves Now Network

Endangered Habitats League

New Hampshire Audubon

Conservation Council of Hawaii