

25 November 2021

Open Call by Civil Society to prioritise pandemic prevention in the Global Pandemics Treaty negotiations

As countries gather at the World Health Assembly on 29 November, we urge Governments to ensure that pandemic prevention is prioritised in discussions on a Pandemic Treaty.

There is a large and growing body of evidence confirming the association between ecosystem degradation, the exploitation of wild animals, intensive farming and emerging infectious diseases and other negative impacts on human and animal health. Around 75% of emerging diseases in humans originate in animals.

COVID-19 has resulted in unprecedented personal, economic and social costs. It has devastated health systems around the world. All of this could have been prevented. The COVID-19 virus is likely to have originated in wild animals, and its spread may have been facilitated by live animal markets and the unsanitary and cruel conditions often found therein. The close contact between humans and animals at such markets exacerbates the risk of pathogen transmission. The outbreaks of COVID-19 in mink in fur farms has demonstrated that intensive rearing systems are especially susceptible to contamination from animal-borne disease. Intensive livestock systems have also been associated with the transmission of zoonotic diseases in the past.

An effective approach to the prevention of pandemics needs to address not only disease surveillance, monitoring, control, and mitigation, but also the risk of pathogens generating and spilling over to humans in the first place, including through intensive farming and the collection from the wild, keeping, breeding, production, trade, marketing and illicit trafficking of wild animals.

Pandemic prevention must be a vital part of any future Pandemic Treaty, and in order to avoid future zoonotic pandemics we must radically change the way we interact with animals.

Failure to do this will result in further personal, economic, social and health disruption from future pandemics, as well as the suffering of animals across the world.

Following consideration of the stated objectives of the proposed Pandemic Treaty, we urge the WHO and interested States to:

- ensure the scope of the proposed Treaty addresses the prevention of the spill over of viruses and other pathogens from animals to humans in the first place. While the full scope of the proposed Treaty has not yet been determined, this aspect of pandemic prevention appears to be absent from the currently available information on the proposal;
- ensure that the precautionary principle informs the way Parties evaluate the potential consequences of an exploitative activity or inaction in face of identified or potential sources or conveyors of pandemics;
- include a legally binding obligation within the proposed Treaty that commits Parties not to trade in, or market, any wild animals, either domestically or internationally, without first assessing the risks of any such trade, or markets, to animal and/or human health, and taking any necessary measures to mitigate such risks;

- recognise the role of food systems on enhancing the risks of virus insurgence and spill over in intensive farming contexts and encourage Member States to develop sustainable food systems.
- encourage States to institutionalise a wider 'One Health' approach (including wellbeing aspects and animal welfare) with shared competence and accountability between ministries responsible for agriculture, environment, trade, health and nutrition;
- engage with existing international regulatory bodies, including but not limited to the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), in order to ensure coherence with related regulatory and implementation mechanisms.
- recognise the need for enhanced cooperation across intergovernmental institutions, including the FAO, UNEP and OIE to comprehensively address pandemic risks that fall beyond the remit of the WHO;
- ensure enhanced solidarity and equity for countries to properly adapt and mitigate pandemic risks by establishing a protocol allowing for financial and technical assistance that can be delivered through different implementation agencies.

We stand ready to support the WHO and interested States in advancing the proposed international Pandemics Treaty, and in establishing how to best incorporate a wider 'One Health' approach (including wellbeing aspects and animal welfare) to wild animal trade and markets within it.

Signed by the following organisation:

Born Free Foundation



Compassion in World Farming



Eurogroup for Animals



FOUR PAWS International



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

Humane Society International



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**

World Animal Protection



Also signed by:

Ian Redmond, OBE, Chairman, Ape Alliance