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Joint open letter to:

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus Director General World Health Organisation Avenue Appia 20 1211 Geneva Switzerland	Dr Zhang Qi Co-ordinator of Traditional and Complementary Medicine Unit (TCM) Department of Service Delivery and Safety World Health Organisation Avenue Appia 20 1211 Geneva Switzerland
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6th April 2020

Dear Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Dr Zhang Qi,

COVID-19: Health risks and wildlife¹ markets – the need for a permanent global ban on wildlife markets and a highly precautionary approach to wildlife trade.

The undersigned organisations acknowledge and commend the World Health Organisation’s current efforts to contain the pandemic spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

On the occasion of World Health Day, in the midst of a global pandemic believed to have originated in a live wildlife market, we call upon the WHO to publicly and unequivocally state the proven link between these markets and serious threats to human health. In line with its stated mission to serve public health at all times, we urge the WHO to recommend that governments worldwide permanently ban live wildlife markets and the use of wildlife in traditional medicine. This decisive action, well within the WHO’s mandate, would be an impactful first step in adopting a highly precautionary approach to wildlife trade that poses a risk to human health.

While a robust global response is critical in detecting, treating and reducing transmission, it is equally necessary to take vital measures to prevent similar emerging infectious diseases developing into pandemics with the associated threats to human life, and social and economic well-being.

The COVID-19 outbreak is believed to have originated at wildlife markets in China, and transmitted to humans as a result of close proximity between wildlife and people.² Further research suggests that bats and pangolins may have been involved in the transmission chain of the virus to people³. But let us stress that it was the actions of people that created the environment in which this transmission was possible.

This is not the first time that infectious diseases have been linked to wild animals in recent years. Between 2002 and 2003, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), inflicted by a coronavirus which is also believed to have emerged from wildlife markets in China, resulted in more than 8,000 human

¹ In this document the term ‘wildlife’ refers to fauna in the wild or bred in captivity.

² 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*.

³ Andersen, G.A., Rambaut, A., Lipkin, W.I. et al. The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2. *Nat Med* (2020)

cases across 29 countries, and 774 deaths⁴. Failure to enforce permanent bans on all wildlife markets then allowed for a similar, but more severe, disease to emerge. Other significant zoonotic diseases, the transmission of which has been associated with wildlife, include Ebola, MERS, HIV, bovine tuberculosis, rabies, and leptospirosis.⁵

Zoonotic diseases are responsible for over two billion cases of human illness and over two million human deaths each year.⁵ How many of these cases directly or indirectly originate from wildlife is hard to calculate, due to overlapping reservoirs in livestock and wild animal populations. However, considering the significance of wildlife as a reservoir of emerging infectious diseases, wildlife origins of zoonoses must be of primary concern. Sixty percent (60%) of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic and 70% of these are thought to originate from wildlife.⁶

The risk of zoonotic disease transmission is heightened further by the unregulated and unhygienic conditions associated with wildlife markets, where close proximity between humans and animals provide the perfect opportunity for pathogens to spread. This risk is further exacerbated by the conditions in which animals are typically farmed or collected from the wild, transported to and held at such markets, which inevitably result in large numbers of animals of different species being held in crowded conditions in close proximity, causing immense stress and weakening their immune systems. Such conditions, coupled with close proximity to people at wildlife markets, provide the ideal situation for pathogens to replicate, spread, and potentially infect people.

Pangolins, which are considered likely by some researchers to be involved in the transmission chain of COVID-19, are commonly used as ingredients for Traditional Medicine, as are many other wildlife species such as turtles, leopards, tigers, lions and bears, with bear bile injections being officially recommended as a treatment for COVID-19.⁷ These animals are either farmed or poached from the wild to supply the demand - a practice that is entirely unnecessary given the viable plant or non-wildlife based alternatives recognized by Traditional Medicine. Risk of disease transmission is prevalent across all aspects of wildlife trade, which supplies products to the Traditional Medicine industry. For example, bovine tuberculosis has been documented among wild and captive-bred lions, posing a substantial risk of zoonosis to consumers and people involved in the lion bone trade, particularly those who work in breeding farms, slaughter and processing facilities in South Africa. Reptiles such as snakes and geckos, which are also used in Traditional Medicine, are frequent sources of Salmonellosis infections in people.⁸

While Traditional Medicine is a recognized medicinal system in many countries and cultures, and can play an important health role, the vast majority of ingredients are plant or mineral based, with hundreds of recognized alternatives to ingredients derived from wildlife. The trade in wildlife and parts and products derived from them for Traditional Medicine is unnecessary and indefensible, as it poses a risk to global health. Studies have highlighted that over 80% of Traditional Medicine consumers would consider herbal or synthetic alternatives to wild animal products.^{9,10} In China,

⁴ World Health Organisation. Summary of probable SARS cases with onset of illness from 1 November 2002 to 31 July 2003. https://www.who.int/csr/sars/country/table2004_04_21/en/

⁵ Grace, D., Mutua, F., Ochungo, P., et al. Mapping of poverty and likely zoonoses hotspots. Zoonoses Project 4. Report to the UK Department for International Development. 2012

⁶ Jones, K.E., Patel, N.G., et al. Global trends in emerging infectious diseases. *Nature*. 2008

⁷ Office of the Chinese Medicine Bureau, General Office of the Health and Health Commission. Notice on Issuing a New Coronary Virus Pneumonia Diagnosis and Treatment Plan (Trial Version 7). issued March 03 2020. Available as PDF on http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2020-03/04/content_5486705.htm

⁸ Mermin, J., Hutwagner, L., Vugia, D., et al. Reptiles, Amphibians, and Human Salmonella Infection: A Population-Based, Case-Control Study. *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 38 (Supp 3). 2004

⁹ World Animal Protection. Cruel Cures – The industry behind bear bile production and how to end it. 2020

¹⁰ Moorhouse, T.P., Coals, P.G.R., D’Cruze, N., Macdonald, D.W. Reduce or redirect? Which social marketing interventions could influence demand for traditional medicines? *Biological Conservation* 242.2020

academics recognized that a ban on wildlife consumption is not enough to protect public health from wildlife-associated diseases. They called on the government to support transitioning the wildlife farming industry away from the production of Traditional Medicine.¹¹

Any policies and practices that sustain the wildlife trade carry a huge and unpredictable public health risk that could lead to future outbreaks and pandemics of zoonotic diseases among human populations.

The impact of COVID-19 in terms of loss of human life, physical and mental health, the global economy, livelihoods and the quality of public life has been utterly devastating and cannot be underestimated. At the time of writing, COVID-19 has led to 1,218,114 confirmed cases and 65,841 deaths across 208 countries. According to calculations by the UN and others, the COVID-19 pandemic could cost the global economy between US\$1 - 2.7 trillion and is triggering a global recession forcing states to introduce costly stimulus packages.^{12,13} The costs to the international community of fighting a global pandemic are vastly higher than the costs of preventing it in the first place, including eliminating live wildlife markets and funding the coordinated global response needed to bring an end to the wildlife trade.

In conclusion, the demand for wildlife and wildlife products is a primary cause of the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases and a severe risk to global health. We call on the World Health Organisation to recognise that it has a significant role to play to mitigate such global health risks.

We therefore strongly urge the World Health Organisation to:

- Recommend to governments worldwide that they institute a permanent ban on live wildlife markets, drawing an unequivocal link between these markets and their proven threats to human health.
- Recommend to governments that they address the potential risks to human health from the trade in wildlife - including collection from the wild, ranching, farming, transport, and trade through physical or online markets for any purpose – and act to close down or limit such trade in order to mitigate those risks.
- Unequivocally exclude the use of wildlife, including from captive bred specimens, in the WHO's definition and endorsement of Traditional Medicine and revise WHO's 2014-2023 Traditional Medicine Strategy accordingly to reflect this change.
- Assist governments and lead a coordinated response among the World Trade Organisation, World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and other multilateral organisations worldwide in awareness-raising activities to clearly inform of the risks of wildlife trade to public health, social cohesion, economic stability, law and order, and individual health.
- Support and encourage initiatives that deliver alternative sources of protein to subsistence consumers of wild animals, in order to further reduce the risk to human health.

We welcome your consideration of this important matter and stand ready to assist.

Yours sincerely,

¹¹ Wang, H., Shao, J., Chuai, Z., et al. Wildlife consumption ban is insufficient. Science. Vol 367, Issue 6485. 2020

¹² United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Coronavirus: Can policymakers avert a trillion-dollar crisis? 9 March 2020: <https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2300>

¹³ Bloomberg. Coronavirus Could Cost the Global Economy \$2.7 Trillion. 6 March 2020: <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2020-coronavirus-pandemic-global-economic-risk/>

For and behalf of the following organisations:

1	AAP Animal Advocacy and Protection	171	In Defence of Animals - USA
2	Aaranyak - India	172	In Defense of Animals - International
3	Aberdeen Music Tuition	173	Institute for Critical Animal Studies - Africa
4	Action for Dolphins	174	International Aid For Animal Foundation
5	Action for Elephants	175	International Animal Rescue
6	Advocates4Earth	176	International Otter Survival Fund
7	Africa Network for Animal Welfare	177	International Primate Protection League
8	African Pangolin Working Group	178	International Wildlife Bond
9	Albert Schweitzer Stiftung für unsere Mitwelt	179	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
10	All Life In A Viable Environment	180	Israeli Primate Sanctuary
11	Alliance for Earth, Life, Liberty & Advocacy	181	Jakarta Animal Aid Network
12	Amboseli Trust for Elephants	182	Japan Anti-Vivisection Association
13	Ananta Jyoti Dhayn Kendra	183	Japan Tiger and Elephant Fund
14	Andean Cat Alliance	184	Japan Wildlife Conservation Society
15	Animal Aid International	185	Kasanka Trust Limited
16	Animal International	186	Korea Animal Rights Advocates
17	Animal Alliance of Canada	187	KYMA sea conservation & research
18	Animal Concerns Research & Education Society	188	La Fondation Droit Animal, Ethique et Sciences (LFDA)
19	Animal Defenders International	189	Lady Freethinker
20	Animal Friends Croatia	190	Landmark Foundation
21	Animal Friends Jogja	191	Latin American and Caribbean Network for Bat Conservation (RELCOM)
22	Animal Guardians	192	Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization
23	Animal Kingdom Foundation	193	Lawyers for Animal Protection in Africa
24	Animal Law Reform South Africa	194	Liberia Chimpanzee Rescue & Protection
25	Animal Legal Defense Fund	195	Lifelong Animal Protection
26	Animal Liberation Sanctuary	196	Loomus (Estonia)
27	Animal People Forum	197	Love Animal House Thailand
28	Animal Projects & Environmental Education Sdn Bhd	198	LUSH UK
29	Animal Protection Agency	199	Mabula Ground Hornbill Project
30	Animal Protection and Environmental Sanctuary	200	Melbourn Dolphin
31	Animal Protection Denmark / Dyrenes Beskyttelse	201	Monkey Helpline
32	Animal Protection Party of Canada	202	Moving Animals
33	Animal Rescue Cambodia	203	National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
34	Animal Research Connections	204	National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
35	Animal Rights Center Japan	205	National Council of SPCAs - South Africa
36	Animal Sanctuary Trust Indonesia	206	National Park Rescue

37	Animal Society for the Protection of Animals (Macau)	207	Natural Resources Conservation Network
38	Animal Talk Africa	208	Neotropical Primate Conservation
39	Animal Welfare And Anti Harassment Society	209	Nepal Animal Welfare and Research Center
40	Animals Asia Foundation	210	New Zealanders for Endangered Wildlife
41	Animals Australia	211	NOAH - For Animal Rights
42	Animals Lebanon	212	Nsefu Wildlife Conservation Foundation
43	Annamiticus	213	NY4Whales
44	Ape Alliance	214	Oceanic Preservation Society
45	ARCA Brasil	215	OI Pejeta Conservancy
46	Association Daridibó	216	One Nature Films
47	Association de Défense des Ressources Marines	217	One Voice (France)
48	AWARE: Animal Welfare Awareness, Research and Education	218	OneKind
49	Baboon Matters	219	ONG Sante Animale Afrique
50	Bali Animal Welfare Association	220	Orangutan Appeal UK
51	Bali Street Dog Fund Australia	221	Orangutan Foundation
52	Ban Animal Trading	222	Orca Rescues Foundation
53	Bat Conservation Africa	223	OSCAP
54	Bat Conservation Trust	224	Outraged South African Citizens Against Rhino Poaching
55	BatLife Europe	225	Painted Dog Conservation - Zimbabwe
56	BatLife Ghana	226	Pan African Sanctuary Alliance
57	Bats without Borders	227	Panthera
58	Bears in Mind	228	Panthera Africa
59	Beauty Without Cruelty - South Africa	229	PEACE (Put an End to Animal Cruelty and Exploitation)
60	Big Cat Rescue	230	Pegasus Foundation
61	BIOCONCIENCIA A.C.	231	Penguin Global Society
62	Biofuelwatch	232	People for Animal Care and Kindness
63	Blood Lions	233	People for Animals, Odisha
64	Blue Cross of India	234	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)
65	Blue Sky Society Trust	235	Performing Animal Welfare Society
66	Bolivian Bat Conservation Program	236	PETA Asia 亚洲善待动物组织
67	Bonobo Conservation Initiative	237	Pettus Crowe Foundation
68	Born Free Foundation	238	Pit-Track K9 Conservation & Anti-Poaching
69	Born Free USA	239	Plants and Animals Welfare Society (PAWS Asia)
70	Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre	240	Pro Elephant Network
71	Borneo Nature Foundation	241	Pro Wildlife
72	Brighter Green	242	Protecting African Lions
73	Bring the Elephant Home	243	Pup Aid
74	Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting	244	Rapad Maroc (Morocco)
75	Campaigns and Activism for Animals in the Industry (CAAI)	245	reEarth
76	Cape Leopard Trust	246	Responsabile Nazionale Diritti Animali

77	Captured in Africa Foundation	247	Rettet den Regenwald (Rainforest Rescue)
78	CATCA Environmental and Wildlife Society	248	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
79	Center for Biological Diversity	249	RSPCA Australia
80	Centre for Animal Rehabilitation and Education	250	SAI (Save Animals Initiative) Sanctuary Trust
81	Centre for Wildlife Studies	251	Sanctuary Education Advisory Specialists
82	Cetacean Society International	252	Sanctuary for Health & Reconnection to Animals & Nature
83	Change for Animals Foundation	253	Santuário de Elefantes Brasil
84	Cheetah Conservation Botswana	254	Sarawak Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
85	Chelui4lions	255	Save The Asian Elephants
86	Coalition of African Animal Welfare Organisations	256	Scorpion Foundation Indonesia
87	Code Animal	257	Sea Shepherd Legal
88	Community Dog Welfare Kopan	258	Sea Shepherd South Africa
89	Compassion in World Farming	259	SEY Animal Welfare Finland
90	Compassion Unlimited Plus Action	260	Shark Research Institute
91	Compassion Works International	261	Showing Animals Respect and Kindness
92	Conservación de Mamíferos Marinos de Mexico	262	Small Mammal Conservation Organisation
93	Conservation Action Trust India	263	Snow Leopard Conservancy
94	Countryside Management Association	264	Society for Dolphin Conservation, Germany
95	CPR Environmental Education Centre	265	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals - Selangor
96	Danau Girang Field	266	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals - Singapore
97	David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation	267	Society for the Protection of Animals Ljubimci
98	Defenders of Wildlife	268	Society for Travelers Respecting Animal Welfare
99	Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, Taraba State University Jalingo	269	Soi Dog Foundation
100	Deutscher Tierschutzbund e.V. (Germany)	270	South Peninsula Customary Khoisan Council
101	Djurskyddet Sverige (Animal Welfare Sweden)	271	Southern African Fight for Rhinos
102	Dogstop	272	Species Survival Network
103	Dutch Gorilla Foundation	273	Stichting Painted Dog Conservation
104	Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals (Dierenbescherming)	274	Stichting SPOTS
105	Dynamic Planet	275	Sumatran Orangutan Society
106	Earth Island Institute Asia Pacific	276	Sun Bear Centre - Kalimantan
107	Earth Island Institute Int'l Marine Mammal Project	277	Sustainable Travel and Tourism Agenda - Kenya
108	Eco Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement (EAGLE Network)	278	Taiwan SPCA 台灣防止虐待動物協會
109	Elephanatics	279	Tanglewood Foundation
110	Elephant Human Relations Aid	280	Taraba Nature Conservation Initiative - Nigeria
111	Elephant Reintegration Trust	281	Teyeliz, A.C
112	Elephants Alive	282	The Corbett Foundation
113	Elephants DC	283	The Elephants and Bees Project

114	ElephantVoices	284	The Emergent Disease Foundation
115	Elephation	285	The Gorilla Foundation
116	EMS Foundation	286	The Humane League Japan
117	Endangered Species Coalition	287	The Humane Society of Canada
118	Environmental Investigation Agency	288	The Jane Goodall Institute - Nepal
119	Equilibrium Futures	289	The Kerulos Center for Nonviolence
120	Eurogroup for Animals	290	The Philippines Animal Welfare Society
121	FAADA, Spain	291	The Rufford Foundation
122	Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations	292	The Wildlife and Environmental Protection of Trinidad and Tobago
123	FIAPO	293	The Winsome Constance Kindness Trust
124	Fish Welfare Initiative	294	Transfrontier Africa
125	FLIGHT	295	Tree of Compassion
126	Fondation Brigitte Bardot	296	Trésor Foundation
127	Fondation Franz Weber	297	TRUNKS & LEAVES Inc
128	For Elephants	298	Tusk Trust
129	For the Love of Wildlife (FLOW)	299	Two Million Tusks
130	For Tigers	300	Ulinzi Africa Foundation - Kenya
131	Foundation Chimbo	301	Unexpected Wildlife Refuge
132	Four Paws - International	302	Vancouver Humane Society
133	Four Paws - South Africa	303	Vervet Monkey Foundation
134	Franciscan Order - Hong Kong	304	Vogelgat Private Nature Reserve
135	Frankfurt Zoological Society	305	Voice for Asian Elephants Society
136	Fraternité pour le respect animal	306	Voice for dogs abroad
137	Freeland	307	Voice4Lions - South Africa
138	Friendicoes SECA	308	Voice4Lions - UK
139	Friendicoes SECA - India	309	Voices for Animals - Russia
140	Friends of Animals	310	VShine Animal Protection Association
141	Friends of Conservation UK	311	Water and Environment Media Network - Uganda
142	Friends of the Orangutans Malaysia	312	Wellbeing International
143	Future 4 Wildlife	313	Wild Futures
144	Future for Elephants e.V.	314	Wild Law Institute
145	Gearing Up 4 Gorillas	315	Wild Welfare
146	Gibbon Conservation Society	316	WildAid
147	Global Action in the Interest of Animals	317	WildAid Southern Africa
148	Global Animal Law	318	Wildlife ACT
149	Global Biodiversity Youth Network - Kenya	319	Wildlife Alliance
150	Global March for Elephant and Rhino Poaching	320	Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM)
151	Global Sanctuary for Elephants	321	Wildlife At Risk International
152	Global White Lion Protection Trust	322	Wildlife Impact
153	Global Youth Biodiversity Network - Kenya	323	Wildlife Protection Society of India
154	Gordon Consulting New Zealand	324	Wildlife Rescue

155	Great Ape Project	325	Wildlife Rescue and Conservation Association, Guatemala
156	Great Apes Film Initiative	326	Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre
157	Greek Animal Welfare Fund	327	Wildlife SOS
158	Green Girls in Africa	328	Wildlife SOS - India
159	GREY2K USA Worldwide	329	WildlifeDirect
160	Greyhound Compassion	330	Working Wild
161	Hands Off Fernkloof	331	World Animal Net
162	Help Animals India	332	World Animal Protection - Africa
163	Himalayan Animal Rescue Trust	333	World Animal Protection - International
164	Hollow Paws	334	World Cetacean Alliance
165	Humane Research Australia	335	World For All Animal Care And Adoptions
166	Humane Society International - Africa	336	World Parrot Trust
167	Humane Society International - Australia	337	Yangon Animal Shelter
168	Humane Society International - Global	338	Zimbabwe Elephant Foundation
169	HUTAN - Kinabatangan Orang-utan Conservation Programme	339	Zoocheck Canada
170	In Defence of Animals - India		