

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

April 8, 2020

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus  
Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO)  
WHO Headquarters  
Avenue Appia 20  
1211 Geneva, Switzerland

Ms. Monique Eloit  
Director-General, World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)  
OIE Headquarters  
12 rue de Prony  
75017 Paris, France

Qu Dongyu  
Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)  
FAO Headquarters  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00153 Rome, Italy

Dear Directors General,

In order to help prevent the next pandemic, we write today to urge your organizations to take aggressive action toward a global shut down of live wildlife markets and a ban on the international trade of live wildlife that is not intended for conservation purposes. Live wildlife markets, known as “wet” markets, were linked to the 2003 SARS outbreak and are believed to be the source of the current COVID-19. As this pandemic continues to threaten the lives of millions, pushes healthcare systems to the breaking point, and devastates economies around the world, it is imperative that we all take action as a global community to protect public health.

Scientists studying zoonotic diseases – diseases that jump between animals and humans – have pointed to the close proximity of shoppers, vendors, and both live and dead animals at wildlife markets in countries around the world as prime transmission locations for these pathogens. The stress of transport and holding wild animals in these crowded markets where they are also sometimes slaughtered creates an unnatural environment where viruses from different species are able to come in contact, mutate, and spread from one species to another. The viruses can subsequently spread or “spill over” into humans through handling and consumption of wildlife, potentially starting highly contagious outbreaks of new and deadly diseases for which we have no natural immunity -- as we are currently seeing with COVID-19 and have seen with SARS, Ebola, monkeypox and Lassa fever in the recent past.

“Wet” markets in particular pose a threat to global public health because wildlife comes from many different locations without any standardized sanitary or health inspection processes. Market vendors cage animals of different species in close proximity, where the animals are likely to urinate, defecate and potentially bleed or salivate on the animals below them. The risk to food buyers can also be through the slaughter of animals in front of customers, releasing disease carrying fluids like blood, saliva, and excrement into the air, which can then splash or splatter on nearby people, be consumed or inadvertently inhaled by humans.

Scientists estimate that approximately 60-75% of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic and that approximately 72% originate from wildlife. Scientists also estimate that the majority of all future emerging infectious diseases will be zoonotic in nature, and zoonotic diseases are the ecological source for a long history of infectious diseases. For example, in the past 45 years, at least five pandemics have been traced back to bats. Ebola, which has killed 13,500 people in multiple outbreaks since 1976, Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome, better known as MERS, which can be found in 28 countries, and the Nipah virus, which has a 78% fatality rate, all originated in bats. In the case of SARS and the COVID-19 outbreak, bats were also the original hosts. Bats then infected other animals, who infected humans. In the case of HIV, a virus originally developed in chimpanzees and spread to humans when humans hunted these chimpanzees for meat and came into contact with their infected blood.

It is clear that to protect human health, these close and sustained interactions with wildlife must stop. While China has banned the trade and consumption of wild animals in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, there are significant loopholes relating to the current legal trade of wildlife for medicinal purposes. China took similar steps after the 2003 SARS outbreak, but ultimately lifted the restrictions after the outbreak came under control and perceived risk decreased.

As leaders of organizations tasked with ensuring human and animal health, we urge you to work with member states to ensure that live wildlife markets are closed permanently in all countries and that the international trade of live wildlife not intended for conservation purposes is banned.

We thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

/s/ Cory A. Booker

/s/ Lindsey O. Graham

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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

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Lindsey O. Graham  
United States Senator

/s/ Mike Quigley

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Mike Quigley  
United States Representative

/s/ Michael T. McCaul

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Michael T. McCaul  
United States Representative

/s/ Patrick Leahy

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Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator

/s/ Kevin Cramer

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Kevin Cramer  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Thom Tillis

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Thom Tillis  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

/s/ Martha McSally

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Martha McSally  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

/s/ Cindy Hyde-Smith

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Cindy Hyde-Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen

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Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

/s/ Marco Rubio

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Marco Rubio  
United States Senator

/s/ Gary C. Peters

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Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Burr

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Richard Burr  
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse

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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

/s/ David A. Perdue

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David A. Perdue  
United States Senator

/s/Richard J. Durbin

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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory Gardner

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Cory Gardner  
United States Senator

/s/ Tom Udall

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Tom Udall  
United States Senator

/s/ Marsha Blackburn

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Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich

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Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein

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Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz

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Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Fitzpatrick

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Brian Fitzpatrick  
United States Representative

/s/ Ann McLane Kuster

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Ann McLane Kuster  
United States Representative

/s/ Marcy Kaptur

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Marcy Kaptur  
United States Representative

/s/ Nanette Diaz Barragán

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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
United States Representative

/s/ Donna E. Shalala

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Donna E. Shalala  
United States Representative

/s/ Raúl M. Grijalva

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Raúl M. Grijalva  
United States Representative

/s/ Matt Gaetz

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Matt Gaetz  
United States Representative

/s/ Jesús G. "Chuy" García

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Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
United States Representative

/s/ James P. McGovern

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James P. McGovern  
United States Representative

/s/ Darren Soto

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Darren Soto  
United States Representative

/s/ Jan Schakowsky

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Jan Schakowsky  
United States Representative

/s/ Bill Posey

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Bill Posey  
United States Representative

/s/ Joe Neguse

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Joe Neguse  
United States Representative

/s/ Steve Cohen

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Steve Cohen  
United States Representative

/s/ Fred Upton

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Fred Upton  
United States Representative

/s/ Grace Napolitano

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Grace Napolitano  
United States Representative

/s/ Bill Foster

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Bill Foster  
United States Representative

/s/ Earl Blumenauer

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Earl Blumenauer  
United States Representative

/s/ Sean Casten

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Sean Casten  
United States Representative

/s/ Jerry McNerney

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Jerry McNerney  
United States Representative

/s/ Steve Chabot

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Steve Chabot  
United States Representative

/s/ Pete Aguilar

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Pete Aguilar  
United States Representative

/s/ Bill Pascrell Jr.

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Bill Pascrell Jr.  
United States Representative

/s/ Donald M. Payne Jr.

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Donald M. Payne Jr.  
United States Representative

/s/ Betty McCollum

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Betty McCollum  
United States Representative

/s/ Lizzie Fletcher

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Lizzie Fletcher  
United States Representative

/s/ Raja Krishnamoorthi

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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
United States Representative

/s/ Chrissy Houlahan

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Chrissy Houlahan  
United States Representative

/s/ Abigail D. Spanberger

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Abigail D. Spanberger  
United States Representative

/s/ TJ Coxx

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TJ Coxx  
United States Representative

/s/ Eleanor Holmes Norton

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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
United States Representative

/s/ Gerald E. Connolly

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Gerald E. Connolly  
United States Representative

/s/ Mike Gallagher

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Mike Gallagher  
United States Representative

/s/ Debbie Dingell

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Debbie Dingell  
United States Representative

/s/ Daniel W. Lipinski

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Daniel W. Lipinski  
United States Representative

/s/ Christopher H. Smith

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Christopher H. Smith  
United States Representative

/s/ John Katko

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John Katko  
United States Representative

/s/ J. Luis Correa

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J. Luis Correa  
United States Representative

/s/ Jaime Raskin

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Jaime Raskin  
United States Representative

/s/ Ken Buck

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Ken Buck  
United States Representative

/s/ Ted S. Yoho

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Ted S. Yoho  
United States Representative