



HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

7 April 2020

AN OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNMENTS

A Ban on Wildlife Trade, Markets, Transport and Consumption Would Significantly Reduce the Risk of Another Pandemic

To Whom it May Concern:

While understanding that countries around the world are struggling to cope with the immense health and economic challenges presented by the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, Humane Society International hereby requests that your government play an urgent leadership role in preventing a similar pandemic from emerging in the future.

COVID-19, like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) before it, started in wildlife markets in China. During the 2002 SARS outbreak, the government of China closed wildlife markets, but re-opened them after the outbreak waned. A new outbreak happened within months of the re-opening.

In the intervening years, scientists warned that wildlife markets in China and other countries around the world were ticking 'time bombs' waiting for the right combination of coronaviruses to release another pandemic. The attached White Paper on the relationship between wildlife markets and pandemic disease sets out the scientific evidence for the causal relationship between wildlife markets (or 'wet markets') and zoonotic pandemics. Societies everywhere are paying the price for not heeding these clear warnings.

Again, in response to COVID-19, China has temporarily closed wildlife markets (though with a notably long and problematic list of exempted species, including many known to carry coronaviruses) and banned consumption of wildlife for food, but markets there appear to be re-opening. Animal protection organizations in China have urged the government to expand the ban to cover all wild animals, traded and consumed for all purposes, and to make the ban permanent.

If concerted and coordinated action is not taken to close wildlife markets around the globe, the emergence of another coronavirus-based disease in the future is a practical certainty. Today, on World Health Day, with the cost of the current pandemic fresh in our minds, Humane Society International is urging all governments to commit to specific actions:

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For countries with existing wildlife markets:

1. To enact immediate bans on wildlife markets, trade, transport and consumption for all purposes. Such bans should include both wild-caught and captive-bred wildlife, because these are often mixed in trade; and the ban should include captive breeding of wildlife for commercial purposes.
2. To commence public education campaigns on the risks of wildlife trade and consumption to human health.

For all countries:

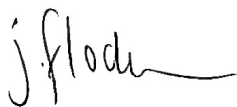
3. To ban trade in wild animals, including import and export, especially mammals and birds because they carry coronaviruses.
4. To commit to intergovernmental cross-agency co-ordination facilitating information and policy-sharing, towards a common goal of eliminating the risk of coronavirus pandemics associated with wildlife trade and markets.
5. To create and support mechanisms to assist people whose livelihoods are based on wildlife trade, transport and consumption, as well as captive-breeding of wildlife for commercial purposes, in transitioning to other livelihoods.

Regarding point 4, we note that the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has established an informal advisory group^[1] on COVID-19 and the human-animal interface. We urge governments to request that this become a formal group, with participation mandated for all relevant expert intergovernmental agencies (including the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Codex Alimentarius Commission)) and that it be given clear scope, terms and budget to enable it to provide unambiguous scientific advice to governments on the subject of wildlife trade and pandemic prevention.

Humane Society International also suggests convening a high-level intergovernmental policymaker group tasked with reviewing and implementing necessary policy actions pertaining to wildlife trade/coronavirus risk reduction. Although disease outbreaks like COVID-19 may have only a single country source, their impacts are global and hence a global response is necessary.

Thank you for considering these recommendations, I would be pleased to have a phone or video call with you to discuss further.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Flocken
President
Humane Society International

[1] <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>