

27 February 2023

To: Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General, WHO &
Esteemed Ambassadors of Member States of the WHO

Open Letter to the World Health Organisation and Member States

Re: Pandemic Instrument– Urgent Need to take Zoonotic Outbreaks Seriously

Dear Dr. Tedros, Dear Ambassadors,

We would like to begin this letter by thanking you for your commitment to prevent, prepare for and respond to future pandemics.

We, as concerned members of Civil Society, urge the World Health Organization (WHO) and its Member States to effectively prevent future pandemics by tackling the root causes and drivers of zoonotic disease outbreaks at the human-animal-environment interface. The toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on all countries and populations builds a stronger case than ever for your leadership. The historical opportunity for transformative change in ensuring health for all will only be possible if meaningful measures towards prevention at the source are implemented via the One Health Approach as defined by the One Health High Level Expert Panel and endorsed by the Quadripartite.

Pandemics have now become an existential threat to everyone, especially vulnerable individuals, communities, populations and the ecosystem at large. It is just three years since the COVID-19 pandemic emerged with devastating consequences; however, the next global pandemic could happen at any time. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is spreading and has been affecting a growing number of mammal populations, sparking fears of human transmission and spread. The WHO has acknowledged that Avian Flu has the potential to spread even further and to other mammal populations, even to humans. However, in spite of this acknowledgement, we are disappointed to see that bold measures to prevent outbreaks at the source by tackling high-risk activities — such as habitat destruction, wildlife trade, animal trafficking and consumption, and intensive animal agriculture — are still not sufficiently included within the Zero Draft of the pandemic instrument. A greater focus on prevention is needed throughout the pandemic instrument. Protecting human health is contingent on the extent to which we protect animals and the environment, and measures within the instrument must extend beyond those aimed at preparing for and responding to future pandemics.

Pandemics are a One Health matter and can therefore only be tackled holistically to be effective, yet not all aspects of One Health are reflected across the instrument. While this coalition recognises that the WHO is collaborating closely with the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as the Quadripartite on pandemics and One Health, the mandates and expertise within other members of the Quadripartite are not yet adequately reflected within the pandemic instrument's zero draft.

Leaving the burden of action on pandemics to human health institutions only, will not lead to the necessary collaboration and preventative responses at the community, national, regional and international levels. For this reason, we strongly advocate for formalizing the role of all Quadripartite institutions in the instrument, benefitting from their expertise and rooting the One Health approach, as the guiding principle, into the entire pandemic instrument. This should consider the One Health Joint Plan of Action (OH JPA) and corresponding national One Health action plans as an effective pathway towards preventing pandemics.

Tasking the Quadripartite with supporting Member States in developing and implementing One Health strategies will help ensure those strategies encompass a whole of government and whole of society approach. This in turn will ensure equity and enable the most vulnerable communities and populations at the human-animal-environment interface to transition away from high-risk practices without a threat to their livelihoods. By protecting animals and the environment, those communities and others will be protected from disease outbreaks that can develop into pandemics.

The 194 member countries of the WHO have come together with the promise that they will protect us all from the next pandemic because *no one is safe until everyone is safe*. By acting now, breaking institutional silos and taking necessary action, the WHO, under your leadership, can ensure *an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems*. The time is now.

Thank you for considering our concerns and requests.

Sincerely,



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Pan African Sanctuary Alliance



Ecoflix



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The Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime



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World Animal Protection



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World Federation for Animals