

17th June, 2021

**To the Office of UN Secretary-General António Guterres
UN Secretariat
405 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017**

Your Excellency,

I turn to you in light of the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. As of today, COVID-19 has killed more than 3.7 million people, infected over 173 million, and had an immense economic impact. The resulting loss of life and livelihoods are yet to be fully realized and will last long into the future.

Scientists and researchers have cautiously traced the outbreak to a “wet market” in Wuhan, China. Wet markets are places where animals (wild and domesticated) are bought, sold, and slaughtered for human consumption. (These places are so called partially in reference to the blood, excrement, and other uncontained biological fluids involved in the holding and killing of these animals.)

At Animal Equality, our mission of protecting animals has a direct impact on the health of humans and our planet. Never has this been more true than now, and never has the need for a joint response to the challenges we face been more urgent. That is why we started an international campaign demanding a ban on the sale of live animals at wet markets worldwide. Public support of the campaign has been tremendous, with over 569,675 people signing our petition calling for a ban.

Today, we present to you the names of these hundreds of thousands of individuals, who are calling on Your Excellency to use the powers of your office to protect their health, the health of their loved ones, and the well-being of the animals with whom we share our planet. These petitioners urge Your Excellency to publicly acknowledge the risks live animal sales pose to global health, and to urge policymakers all over the world to restrict the sale of live animals in wet markets.

Other global leaders share our concerns. On 12 April 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) released a guidance document¹ calling for an immediate suspension in the trade in live caught wild animals due to zoonotic disease concerns.

We urge Your Excellency to officially adopt this recommendation **and also extend it to include sales of domesticated animals, captive-bred wild animals, and wild-caught animals of all species (not just mammalian)**. The welfare of animals of all species sold at these markets is of great concern, and the next global pandemic could just as easily come from a bird as from a bat or a pangolin. During the human outbreak of avian influenza A (H5N1) in 1997, for instance, a visit to a retail poultry stall or a market selling live poultry in the week before onset of illness was significantly associated with the risk of becoming infected. As the WHO, OIE, and UNEP report stated, “Avian influenza viruses ... can be transmitted from infected animals to humans during handling and slaughter in the traditional market setting. **It is therefore important to limit, as far as possible, close contact between live animals, slaughtering operations and humans in such markets.**”²

COVID-19 is not an isolated incident – merely the most recent one. Like COVID-19 and H5N1, other disease outbreaks such as SARS have been scientifically linked to wet markets. Animals in these markets are packed into small cages or spaces, where the lower levels of the cages are inundated with the fluids and excrements of the upper ones.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and Dr. Joseph Fair, Vice President and Director of Research and Development for Metabiota, are among the cadre of renowned scientists and virologists that have warned authorities of the public health dangers associated with the sale of live animals at wet markets. Ending these sales is critical to avoid the proliferation of new pathogens that will inevitably make their way to humans due to the unsanitary conditions and poor health of the animals confined and killed there.

¹ *Reducing public health risks associated with the sale of live wild animals of mammalian species in traditional food markets*, World Health Organization (12 April 2021), <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Food-safety-traditional-markets-2021.1> (jointly released by the WHO, OIE, and UNEP).

² *ibid.*, p. 3.

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We politely request that Your Excellency heed the voices of the 569.675 petitioners calling on you to prevent the next pandemic, by bringing the problem of live animal sales at wet markets to the attention of the UN Security Council and other global leaders who have the power to swiftly enact critical restrictions on these dangerous and inhumane places.

The next pandemic could be right around the corner if nothing is done to eliminate the sale of live animals at wet markets. The risks posed to all human and animal life on this planet are too great to ignore.

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Núñez

President - Animal Equality