

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,



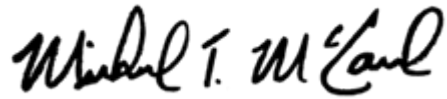
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



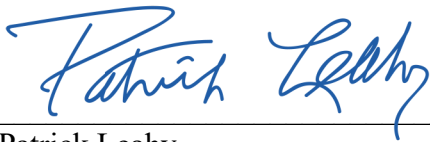
Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator



Mike Quigley
United States Representative



Michael T. McCaul
United States Representative



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



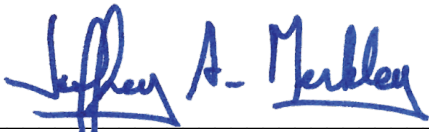
Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Martha McSally
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator




Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Richard Burr
United States Senator



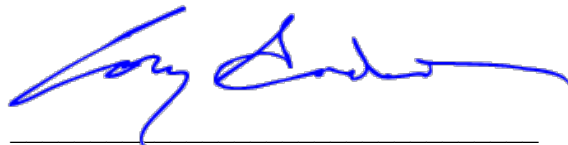
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



David A. Perdue
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



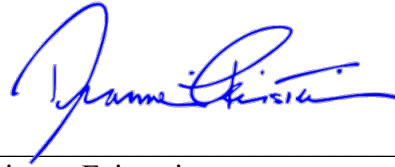
Tom Udall
United States Senator



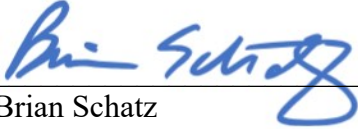
Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



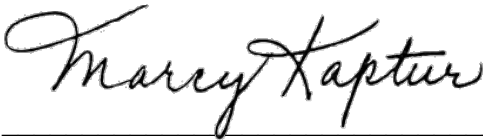
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Brian Fitzpatrick
United States Representative



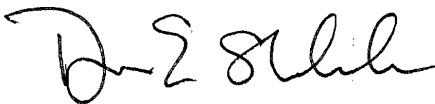
Ann McLane Kuster
United States Representative



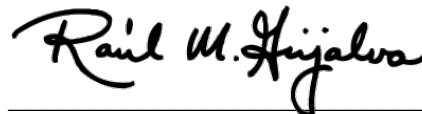
Marcy Kaptur
United States Representative



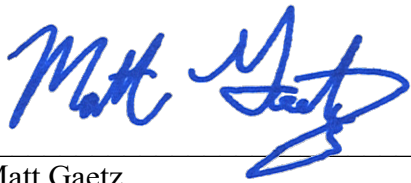
Nanette Diaz Barragán
United States Representative



Donna E. Shalala
United States Representative



Raúl M. Grijalva
United States Representative



Matt Gaetz
United States Representative



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
United States Representative



James P. McGovern
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Darren Soto
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Jan Schakowsky
United States Representative



Bill Posey
United States Representative



Joe Neguse
United States Representative



Steve Cohen
United States Representative



Fred Upton
United States Representative



Grace Napolitano
United States Representative



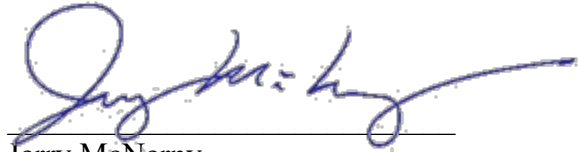
Bill Foster
United States Representative



Earl Blumenauer
United States Representative



Sean Casten
United States Representative



Jerry McNerny
United States Representative



Steve Chabot
United States Representative



Peter Aguilar
United States Representative



Bill Pascrell Jr.
United States Representative



Donald M. Payne Jr.
United States Representative



Betty McCollum
United States Representative



Lizzie Fletcher
United States Representative



Raja Krishnamoorthi
United States Representative



Chrissy Houlahan
United States Representative



Abigail D. Spanberger
United States Representative



TJ Cox
United States Representative



Eleanor Holmes Norton
United States Representative



Gerald E. Connolly
United States Representative



Mike Gallagher
United States Representative



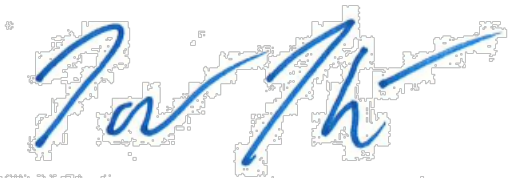
Debbie Dingell
United States Representative



Daniel W. Lipinski
United States Representative



Christopher H. Smith
United States Representative

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John Katko
United States Representative

A cursive handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Luis Correa'.

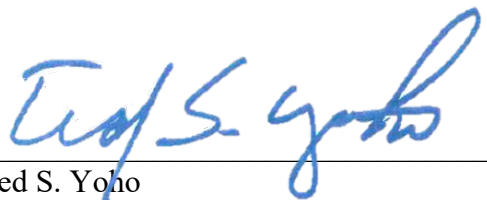
J. Luis Correa
United States Representative

A cursive handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jaime Raskin'.

Jaime Raskin
United States Representative

A cursive handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ken Buck'.

Ken Buck
United States Representative

A cursive handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ted S. Yoho'.

Ted S. Yoho
United States Representative