



## **Measures to be discussed at the World Health Assembly will *not* prevent future pandemics**

***Statement released by the Coalition on Preventing Pandemics at the Source in advance of the 74<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly, May 20, 2021***

On May 24, nearly 200 governments will gather virtually for the **74<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly** and will take key decisions about the future of the World Health Organization. The [theme](#) of this year's meeting is, **"Ending this pandemic, preventing the next: building together a healthier, safer and fairer world."**

We have reviewed the World Health Assembly agenda, draft resolutions, and other important inputs such as the recent [report](#) of the *Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response*. [Our coalition](#) is deeply concerned that these documents and recommendations do not address *the actual cause of all pandemics over the last century*—human-driven spillover of viruses from animals, particularly wildlife, into people—and thereby fails to address the need for true prevention.

Experience with Ebola and COVID-19 in just the past seven years teaches us that infectious diseases of zoonotic origin will challenge us again and again. **Post-spillover preparedness and response efforts alone, as emphasized by WHO and its advisors, will not prevent future pandemics.** In fact, it is a recipe for failure, given that a future pathogen may have characteristics preventing it from being "contained" (e.g., pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic transmission) and given the rampant spread of dis-information that decreases countermeasure uptake at the population-level (e.g., the anti-vaccine movement that may prevent many countries from achieving herd immunity for COVID).

*We are not undervaluing the importance of health system preparedness. Instead, we are simply making the case that it is only part of the solution.*

**We urge the WHA Delegates from all governments to address pandemic prevention at the root and incorporate spillover prevention into the scope of fully comprehensive pandemic prevention efforts.**

Specific areas where we already know that strong action, building on additional financing and capacity, will lower the risk of pathogen spillover from animals to people, include the following:

- **Reducing tropical deforestation, forest degradation and forest fragmentation** through financial and technology incentives and support, especially in higher-risk regions. This could include supporting key tropical countries and forest-based communities to establish and effectively manage protected and conserved areas, as well as locally designed solutions, in hotspots for emerging diseases.
- **Shutting down commercial wildlife trade and markets that risk contributing to zoonotic spillover events.** This will involve developing and implementing legislation, regulations, incentives, and pathogen surveillance mechanisms based on proven technologies – at every stage from capture or production to markets and consumption.
- **Improving biosecurity on farms** to eliminate contact between free-ranging wildlife and domestic animals in emerging disease hotspots.



As with other aspects of pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, new funding sources and mechanisms need not entirely cover the costs of the above. Ongoing global and national programs to address climate change, biodiversity loss, law enforcement and sustainable agriculture already contribute. ***However, they are woefully insufficient, and are not deployed with pathogen spillover prevention outcomes in mind.***

Maintaining status quo on these drivers of spillover will miss the primary opportunity to reduce the risk of future pandemics. We must rapidly scale up proven approaches summarized above to prevent future pandemics of zoonotic origin and ensure that sufficient funds are committed to address this issue comprehensively. We urge global leaders to look beyond the traditional silos that constrain our ability to solve systems issues. ***A One Health approach that integrates human and animal health and environmental protection is needed to prevent pandemics.***

The world is watching.

**Statement prepared and supported by the following organizations that make up [The Coalition for Preventing Pandemics at the Source](#) (in alphabetical order):**

Conservation International  
Dalberg Catalyst  
EcoHealth Alliance  
Health In Harmony  
INCT EECBio, Brazil  
PIVOT  
R2H Action (Right to Health)  
Rainforest Alliance  
The Nature Conservancy  
Wildlife Conservation Society  
World Resources Institute  
World Wildlife Fund

Also endorsed by the group **Marked by COVID**.

**Quotes from members of our coalition:**

“After a decade working with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention responding to outbreaks such as Ebola and COVID-19, it became clear to me that a fundamental shift in approach is needed to prevent future pandemics. This must include preventing the spillover of viruses from birds and mammals into humans, prevention at the source.” **Dr. Neil Vora, MD, Pandemic Prevention Fellow, Conservation International; formerly a Commander in the US Public Health Service and medical epidemiologist for the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

“How many more pandemics will we see before policy makers recognize that their approach to dealing with such crises is deeply flawed? We urgently need a systemic shift, with public health and environmental experts working together to address spillover risk from wild animals to humans.” **Sonila Cook, CEO, Dalberg Catalyst and Co-Founder of the Preventing Pandemics at the Source initiative.**



“Halting zoonotic spillover at the source is an essential piece of any comprehensive pandemics prevention strategy. The added bonus of taking these measures is the other benefits to communities they provide, including improving health outcomes in a cost-effective manner.” **Dr. Rebecca Shaw, Chief Scientist, WWF.**

“To prevent the next pandemic, efforts at better preparedness and public health are laudable, but will not be enough. An ounce of prevention is truly worth a pound of cure. Governments, and all of us, must work across disciplines and take all necessary actions, including protecting and retaining intact ecosystems, and closing down commercial wildlife markets for human consumption, particularly in birds and mammals, and the trade that supplies those markets.” **Susan Lieberman, Ph.D., Vice President, International Policy, Wildlife Conservation Society.**

“Pandemics are not random, chance events that happen to us. Most pandemics happen because of human activities such as deforestation, wildlife trade and intensive farming without biosecurity - activities that increase contact among people, our livestock and wildlife that make it easier for viruses to jump from animals into people. We can prevent pandemics by changing how we impact natural environments. It requires a global commitment to strengthen disease surveillance systems *and* work with at-risk communities to reduce their exposure to animal viruses. Preventing spillover of zoonotic viruses is one of the most important things we can do to ensure that something like COVID-19 doesn’t happen again.” **Dr. Jonathan Epstein, epidemiologist and Vice President for Science and Outreach at EcoHealth Alliance.**

“To reverse deforestation of tropical rainforests – one of *the* critical elements to preventing future pandemics - we trust rainforest people’s expertise and wisdom. And from Brazil to Madagascar and Indonesia, they’ve quite naturally designed a new genre of intervention that consistently links their health care access and household economy to jobs development and the integrity of their rainforests. Tropical rainforest communities hold the key to preventing the next pandemic. We must listen to them.” **Dr. Jonathan Jennings, Executive Director, Health In Harmony.**

“The world faces four tightly inter-linked existential crises – biodiversity loss, climate change, global inequities, and the constant and growing threat of zoonotic-origin pandemics, all a result of human actions, linked to an ongoing breakdown in our relationship with nature. We need to respond to these crises across sectors and with a sense of urgency.” **Dr. Christian Walzer Executive Director, Health, Wildlife Conservation Society.**

“Preventing pandemics at the source – by combating deforestation, commercial trade and consumption of wild animals, and unsafe livestock practices – is just common sense to protect ourselves from another terrible plague like COVID-19. We know the facts, and what we need to do. I fear future generations will curse us for knowing what our duty is, but not stepping up to do it.” **Dr. Charles Barber, Senior Biodiversity Advisor, World Resources Institute.**

“The good news is that we know what needs to be done to protect forests, eliminate wildlife trade and make farming safe to reduce the risk of future spillovers and thereby prevent new and deadly diseases in humans. Now we just need political leaders to step up and take the necessary actions, if not now, when?” **Dr. Nigel Sizer, Executive Director, Preventing Pandemics at the Source initiative.**