

June 17, 2021

H.E. Mr. Munir Akram
President, UN Economic and Social Council
c/o Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations
Pakistan House
8 East 65th Street
New York, NY 10065

Your Excellency,

I turn to you in light of the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. As President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), you have seen the grave international economic and social issues this pandemic has had on our world. Today, I present to you the signatures of over 569,675 people asking ECOSOC to issue a specific policy recommendation, described below, to ensure this preventable death and destruction never again ravages our lives.

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 global 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 591,000 people signing our petition calling for a ban.

Today, we present to you the names of over half a million individuals calling on ECOSOC to recommend a ban on live animal sales at wet markets, 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 ECOSOC to publicly acknowledge the risks live animal sales pose to global health and to urge UN Member States 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 ECOSOC 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 all animals 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

Sadly, 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. These markets are packed with people and animals and pose a severe

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.

threat to human health. Their closure 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.

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.

We politely request that Your Excellency heed the voices of the 569,675 petitioners calling on ECOSOC to prevent the next pandemic by issuing an official policy recommendation urging UN Member States to enact critical restrictions on live animal sales at wet markets. To this end, we respectfully ask that Your Excellency put the issue of wet markets on the agenda for the next ECOSOC meeting.

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