



18 May 2021

Dear Excellency,

As discussions continue regarding the content of the High Level Political Forum's Ministerial Declaration, we are writing to bring to your attention an issue we feel is missing from the Ministerial Declaration.

The [Animal Issues Thematic Cluster](#) (AITC) is a coalition of NGOs within the NGO Major Group ensuring that the care, protection, and conservation of animals is included in the Sustainable Development Agenda. Our main objective is to demonstrate the linkages between humans, animals and the environment, and how including animals in policy can contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are very pleased with the additions to paragraph 6 in the most recent draft of the Ministerial Declaration, in particular the need "to critically consider our consumption and production patterns and address environmental degradation, deforestation and forest fragmentation, biodiversity loss, combat climate change." We are also deeply grateful for the language in paragraph 32, which states "We recommit, with an increased sense of urgency and ambition to protecting wildlife and other living species..."

However, we are concerned that paragraph 6 glaringly omits "animals" in the sentence "The COVID-19 pandemic is a compelling reminder of the inextricable relationship between human health, and the environment..." We understand that this sentence in the Ministerial Declaration came directly from the [UN Environment Assembly's \(UNEA's\) contribution to the High Level Political Forum](#). An [earlier draft of UNEA's contribution](#) stated that the pandemic "is also a reminder of the inextricable relationship between humans, **animals** and the environment." However, [one Member State submitted comments](#) to this draft requesting animals be removed from it, stating that UNEP "should not prejudge the origin of the epidemic."

Paragraph 6 does include references to One Health, including a number of decisions related to One Health as well as the recently developed One Health High Level Expert Panel, which is organized in part by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Animals are one of the three pillars of the One Health approach, and the documents referenced all include animals and their health.

[UNEA resolution 3/4](#) on Environment and Health "*recognizes that human, **animal**, plant and ecosystem health are interdependent, and emphasizes in that regard the value of the "One Health" approach, an integrated approach that fosters cooperation between environmental conservation and the human health,*

*animal health and plant health sectors;” and “Notes that human, **animal** and plant health and the environment are interconnected...”*

CBD [decision 14/4](#) “Encourages Parties to promote dialogue among ministries and agencies responsible for the sectors of health (including domestic **animal** and **wildlife** health)...”

The [Terms of Reference](#) for the One Health High-Level Expert Panel states as its purpose: “Recognizing the complex and multidisciplinary issues raised by the interface of human, **animal** and ecosystem health (“One Health”) that require enhanced coordination and collaboration among sectors and agencies, nationally and internationally, the One Health High-Level Expert Panel (“OHHLEP”) provides guidance on One Health-related matters that support improved cooperation among governments.”

In addition, the recently adopted Omnibus Resolution [A/74/L.92](#) “recognizes the value of an integrated One Health approach that fosters cooperation between the human health, **animal** health and plant health, as well as environmental and other relevant sectors,” and the FAO [recognises](#) that “75% of recently emerging infectious diseases affecting humans are of **animal** origin and 60% of all human pathogens are zoonotic...”

Further, the [One Health Commission](#) defines One Health as “collaborative, multisectoral, and trans-disciplinary approach - working at local, regional, national, and global levels - to achieve optimal health and well-being outcomes recognizing the interconnections between people, **animals**, plants and their shared environment” and various reports published in the wake of COVID-19 highlight the importance of animals to human health, including [UNEP’s Preventing the Next Pandemic](#) and [IPBES pandemic report](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic has focused international attention on how our relationship with animals can have global consequences for human health and economic and social development, yet it was only the most recent in a series of serious disease outbreaks of zoonotic origin. We are worried that the omission of animals from the Ministerial Declaration, based not on existing and agreed language or scientific understanding, will have ripple effects which could blunt the ability of international bodies and states to address key root causes of pandemic emergence, namely: our increasingly dysfunctional and high risk relationships with animals.

We urge your country to support the reinstatement of animals to the Ministerial Declaration, so that this key paragraph can accurately reflect both the language of past agreements and the true, scientific underpinnings of the One Health approach, and continue paving the way for multisectoral collaboration in order to mitigate the risk of future pandemics.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jessica Bridgers, Adeline Lerambert and Angela Wright, on behalf of the AITC
Co-organizers of the AITC