



**Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime
response to proposed international Pandemics Treaty**

The Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime (“the Initiative”) was created to address serious gaps in the existing international legal framework for combating wildlife crime and regulating wildlife trade.

This third briefing paper released by the Initiative welcomes the decision of the World Health Assembly in May 2021 to explore the benefits of an International Pandemics Treaty and urges the World Health Organisation and interested States to ensure that any such Treaty helps to prevent future pandemics that could emerge from human interaction with wild animals, and to institutionalise a ‘One Health’ approach to wildlife trade and markets.

This brief is intended to offer some initial tangible ideas on some aspects of the content of an International Pandemics Treaty and thereby help advance discussion on this welcome law reform initiative.

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On behalf of the Steering Group

Briefing Paper, June 2021

Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime urges the proposed international Pandemics Treaty to fully address the prevention of pandemics

The Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime (EWC) welcomes the decision taken by the World Health Assembly in May to explore the benefits of an international Pandemics Treaty (‘the proposed Treaty’) on pandemic preparedness and response under the auspices of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and commends the global health community for its leadership.

While it is still too early to draw any final conclusions about the origins of COVID-19, there is a large and growing body of evidence confirming the association between ecosystem degradation, the exploitation of wild animals, and emerging infectious diseases, and other negative impacts on human health, as well as animal health.

An effective approach to the prevention of pandemics needs to address not only disease surveillance, monitoring, control, and mitigation, but also the risk of pathogens spilling over to people in the first

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place, including through the collection from the wild, keeping, breeding, production, trade, marketing and illicit trafficking of wild animals.

The EWC is promoting international legal reforms that will help to prevent future pandemics that could emerge from human interaction with wild animals, and to institutionalise a 'One Health' approach to wildlife trade and markets. The EWC considers that the proposed Treaty presents an ideal opportunity to achieve this objective.

Following consideration of the stated objectives of the proposed Treaty, the EWC urges the WHO and interested States to:

- ensure the scope of the proposed Treaty addresses the prevention of the spill over of viruses and other pathogens from wild animals to people in the first place. While the full scope of the proposed Treaty has not yet been determined, this aspect of pandemic prevention appears to be absent from the currently available information on the proposal.
- include a legally binding obligation on States within the proposed Treaty that commits Parties not to trade in, or market, any wild animalsⁱ, either domestically or internationally, without first assessing the risks of any such trade, or markets, to animal and/or human health. This would institutionalise taking a 'One Health' approach to wild animal trade and markets.
- engage with existing international regulatory bodies, including the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), in order to ensure coherence with related regulatory and implementation mechanisms.

The EWC stands ready to support the WHO and interested States in advancing the proposed international Pandemics Treaty, and in establishing how to best incorporate a 'One Health' approach to wild animal trade and markets within it.

Background:

Pandemics Treaty

- In March 2021, a [Commentary](#), signed by the Director General of the World Health Organisation, the European Council, and the Presidents or Prime Ministers of 26 countries, called for a new international treaty for pandemic preparedness and response.
- The Treaty would be a legally binding instrument in the form of a Framework Convention established under Article 19 of the [WHO constitution](#), drawing in other relevant organizations. It will be underpinned by the International Health Regulations and other existing global health instruments.
- At the World Health Organisation's World Health Assembly in May 2021, a working group of Member States was [tasked with assessing the benefits of developing a WHO Pandemics](#)

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[Treaty](#). The working group will present its recommendations at a Special World Health Assembly session in November 2021.

- The stated objectives of the proposed Treaty include:
 - Better preparedness to predict, prevent, detect, assess and effectively respond to pandemics in a highly coordinated fashion.
 - Building a more robust international health architecture that will protect future generations.
 - Ensuring universal and equitable access to safe, efficacious and affordable vaccines, medicines and diagnostics for this and future pandemics.
 - Establishing an all-of-government and all-of-society approach, strengthening national, regional and global capacities and resilience to future pandemics.
 - Recognition of a 'One Health' approach that connects the health of humans, animals and our planet.

Mitigating future pandemic risk

- In its [Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics](#), published in 2020, the International Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) estimated that another 1.7 million currently 'undiscovered' viruses are thought to exist in mammals and birds, of which up to 827,000 could have the ability to infect people.
- [Scientists](#) advise that more than 60% of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic, namely infectious diseases that spill over from non-human animals to humans, and more than 70% of these are from wild animals.
- In April 2021, the WHO, OIE and UNEP published [interim guidance](#) on reducing public health risks associated with the sale of live wild animals of mammalian species in traditional food markets.
- [CBD Decision 14/4](#) on Health and Biodiversity, adopted by the Fourteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2018, invited the WHO to *“support the development and implementation of measures, guidance and tools for promoting and supporting the mainstreaming of biodiversity and health linkages in the health sector, and to consider establishing a regular reporting mechanism for the progress of activities on biodiversity and health under the joint work programme of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the World Health Organization.”*

Role of CITES in regulating wildlife trade

- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is the major international treaty regulating trade in wildlife, and it has *the potential* to play an important role in mitigating pandemic risk associated with wildlife trade and markets through the extension of its mandate to include the regulation of international trade in species that are considered to present a risk to human and/or animal health and to consider the animal and health aspects of any proposed trade transaction.

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- The Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime has published [recommendations](#) on how such an extended mandate might be secured, and how it might operate.
- In April 2021, the CITES Standing Committee announced the [establishment of an intersessional working group](#) to consider what role, if any, CITES could play in reducing the risk of future zoonotic disease emergence associated with the international wildlife trade.
- Work to identify CITES-listed species currently in trade that pose a potential zoonotic risk has already been [published by JNCC/WCMC](#); their report also recommended the development of a closer relationship between CITES and the international quartet of OIE, FAO, WHO, and UNEP to advance a 'One Health' approach.
- Additional ongoing studies, including by [Species360](#) (an EWC International Champion), seek to provide additional information that will assist in the proposed creation of a central repository of disease-species associations covering the full range of zoonotic pathogens and their associated diseases.

Illicit wildlife trafficking

- EWC is promoting the development and implementation of a [global agreement on tackling illicit wildlife trafficking](#), in the form of a protocol under the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC), which has been [called for by the President of Costa Rica and the President of Gabon](#), and [supported by the European Commission](#).

ⁱ Defined to include captive bred, farmed and ranched wild animals.