

Special Virtual Session for SBSTTA 24 and SBI 3 on Biodiversity, One Health and COVID-19, Wednesday, 16 December 2020

**Ms Ivonne Higuero's statement, Secretary-General of CITES
Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora**

Thank you Chair, ladies and gentlemen,

The global COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense human suffering and economic distress. It has also shown that we have neglected the inseparable links between human and animal health, and the health of our planet.

To help reduce risks and build a more sustainable post-pandemic future, CITES can contribute with its experience and knowledge of international wildlife trade, developed over close to 50 years.

As mentioned by other speakers, drivers of zoonotic disease emergence are a complex mix of habitat and biodiversity loss, increasing human population densities, changing food systems, land conversion and deforestation for intensive agriculture, globalized trade and travel, climate change, and other factors.

International trade in specimens of CITES-listed species is one of the human-animal interfaces through which animals and animal products are introduced to new environments, along with the pathogens they might carry. International trade is also one of the interfaces through which CITES Parties can consider taking measures to help reduce the risks of future pandemics.

CITES regulates international trade in over 38,000 species of wild animals and plants, and all products and derivatives thereof, from all origins – whether wild, ranched, captive-bred or propagated. While the Convention regulates *cross-border transactions*, domestic regulations of harvest, markets and trade are also relevant. Public health and veterinary quarantine are mentioned in the Convention as areas where Parties may adopt stricter national measures in addition to those required by CITES.

Existing CITES provisions and mechanisms, notably its strict permitting system, regulate the international trade in wildlife to ensure that it is legal, sustainable and traceable. This could provide a solid basis for Parties to consider additional CITES measures that could help mitigate the risks of diseases spreading and make international trade in CITES-listed species safer for health.

In this regard, I wish to highlight the importance of partnerships. Several of these partnerships are formalized in CITES Resolutions, while others exist through agreements at an operational level. I believe that there is scope for reinforcing all of these in the context of One Health.

Our collaboration with agencies such as the World Organisation for Animal Health and the International Air Transport Association helps to oversee aspects of international wildlife trade that specifically pertain to public and animal health. In collaboration with UNCTAD and others, we support electronic solutions for CITES permit management, which can help enforcement agents check across other trade requirements, including biosecurity requirements.

The CITES Secretariat also continues to actively participate in collaborative partnerships on forests and on sustainable wildlife management with MEAs and others, and in the International Consortium to Combat Wildlife Crime with UNODC, Interpol, WMO, and the World Bank.

These partnerships help support CITES Parties in designing and implementing multisectoral policies, legislation, and research for better public health outcomes by indicating how and where better regulation of wildlife trade could be considered – and therefore play a role in the ‘One Health’ approach.

Thank you.