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WWF-Cambodia

21, Street 322,
Boeung Keng Kang I,
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
P.O. Box: 2467

Tel: +855 23 218 034

Fax: +855 23 211 909

www.wwf.org.kh
www.panda.org/greatermekong
wwfcambodia@wwf.org.kh

Press Release

For immediate release

Conditions are rife for next pandemic unless urgent action is taken, WWF warns

While the world continues to grapple with the devastating consequences of COVID-19, WWF is calling for urgent global action to address the key drivers it has identified which will cause future zoonotic disease outbreaks. In a new report 'COVID 19: urgent call to protect people and nature', WWF says that the environmental factors driving the emergence of zoonotic diseases are: the trade and consumption of high-risk wildlife, land-use change leading to deforestation and conversion, expansion of agriculture and unsustainable intensification and animal production.

Numerous warnings from scientists and thought leaders, such as the World Economic Forum (WEF), have been made about the risk of a global pandemic. WEF ranked [pandemics](#) and [infectious diseases](#) as one of the [top global risks](#) over a decade ago, posing 'an acute threat to human life'.

Mr Marco Lambertini, Director General of WWF International said: "We must urgently recognize the links between the destruction of nature and human health, or we will soon see the next pandemic. We must curb the high risk trade and consumption of wildlife, halt deforestation and land conversion as well as manage food production sustainably. All these actions will help prevent the spillover of pathogens to humans, and also address other global risks to our society like biodiversity loss and climate change. There is no debate, and the science is clear; we must work with nature, not against it. Unsustainable exploitation of nature has become an enormous risk to us all."

Questions remain about the exact origins of COVID-19, but all available evidence suggests that it is a [zoonotic disease](#), meaning it jumped from wildlife to humans. The government of China announced a comprehensive ban on the consumption of wild animals on 24 February, which WWF supports and now, the National People's Congress (NPC) is supporting the revision of the existing law on the protection of wildlife, which, if implemented in full, could position China's Wildlife Protection Law as one of the world's most robust and stringent. Other governments must also follow suit and close their high-risk wildlife markets and end this trade once and for all.

Wildlife in protected areas from across the region, Cambodia included, become more vulnerable to poachers since the imposed restriction of movement and isolation to avoid the spread of coronavirus. Cambodian rangers from WWF's supported protected areas are witnessing the increased pressures of illegal activities on the forests including land encroachment, harvesting of non-timber forest products inside restricted zones and hunting with homemade guns and snares. They removed a total of 3,658 sets of snare during the dry season of December 2019-May 2020. This represents an increase of 15% if compared with the number of 2,451 sets of snare removed during the same period of the last dry season. In parallel, the number of illegal land clearing has also increased by 36% with 29 occurrences recorded during period of December 2019-May 2020 and only 12 occurrences registered in December 2018-May 2019.

"In Cambodia, enforcement efforts by the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries have been valiant, and the 2019 Mondulkiri Governor's Circular No. 5 has contributed to reducing the availability of wildlife products and wild meat at the provincial markets and restaurants," said **Mr Seng Teak**, Country Director of WWF-Cambodia. "In order to ensure that Cambodian people remain safe and healthy and that the next zoonotic outbreak doesn't start here, urgent and appropriate measures are needed to end the trade in wild animals – especially mammals, birds and reptiles which are at high risk of transmitting diseases to humans."

The COVID-19 crisis demonstrates that systemic changes must be made to address the environmental drivers of pandemics. WWF is advocating a 'One Health' approach linking the health of people, animals and our

shared environment and wants this to be included in decision making on wildlife and land use change. This should also be incorporated within all business and financing decisions, particularly related to global health.

“In the midst of this tragedy there is an opportunity to heal our relationship with nature and mitigate risks of future pandemics but a better future starts with the decisions governments, companies and people around the world take today.” Said Mr Lambertini. “World leaders must take urgent action to transform our relationship with the natural world. We need a [New Deal for Nature and People](#) that sets nature on the path to recovery by 2030 and safeguards human health and livelihoods in the long-term.”

WWF highlights the upcoming UN Biodiversity Summit, scheduled to take place in September 2020, as a key moment for world leaders to accelerate action on nature ahead of critical decisions on the environment, climate and development, now due to be taken in 2021. Together, these decisions represent an unmissable opportunity to transform our relationship with nature and secure a sustainable future for people and the planet.

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Link to full report “COVID 19: URGENT CALL TO PROTECT PEOPLE AND NATURE”:

<https://explore.panda.org/pandemics>

For more information or enquiries please contact:

TEP Asnarith, Head of communications, advocacy, knowledge management

WWF Office in Cambodia

asnarith.tep@wwf.org.kh

Mobile: 012 957 919

WWF-International Media Office:

news@wwfint.org

Notes to editors:

About the New Deal for Nature and People

Human activities are pushing nature dangerously into the red. We urgently need to change course, to safeguard human health, wellbeing and livelihoods. With world leaders scheduled to take critical decisions on the environment, climate and development in the next year, we have a momentous opportunity to secure a [New Deal for Nature and People](#) that sets nature on the path to recovery by 2030, in support of climate action and the Sustainable Development Goals.

About WWF

WWF is an independent conservation organization, with over 30 million followers and a global network active in nearly 100 countries. Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. Visit panda.org/news for the latest news and media resources; follow us on Twitter @[WWF_media](#)