



Stop wildlife consumption to protect public health and conserve natural resources in Cambodia

Sen Monorom town of Mondulkiri, October 22, 2022 – Wildlife consumption demand are a major driver for poaching, snaring crisis and illegal trade. It also increases the risk of disease transmission from wild animals to humans, posing a grave danger to the environment and human health.

Law enforcement reports from the Mondulkiri's Mobile Law Enforcement Unit showed a confiscation of 1,353 kilograms of wild meat that were illegally traded within the last 18 months from 2021. In parallel, the law enforcement authorities of Stung Treng and Ratanakiri provinces in the last six months seized over two hundred kilograms of bushmeat during their wildlife trafficking crackdowns and wet market raids in these provinces.

“The people who consume bushmeat with the hope for health benefits or a treatment to illnesses and a supplement that brings them strength or social status are wrong, but in contrast wild meat consumption not only potentially affects their health but also motivate poaching, snaring and trafficking of wildlife species that are of global importance,” said **His Excellency Neth Pheaktra**, Secretary of State to the Ministry of Environment.

“Globally significant wild animal species such as the Indochinese tiger and Kouprey already became extinct due to snaring, illegal hunting and trade that continued the killing, leading to drastic declines of other species populations in country's protected areas,” said **Mr. Seng Teak**, WWF-Cambodia Country Director.

The wild animal species that fall victim to consumption demand and illegal trade commonly include ungulate species such as muntjac, wild pig, banteng, sambar as well as monitor lizard, civet, loris among others. A study series on ungulate populations in the eastern plains by the Ministry of Environment and WWF showed between 2010 to 2022 banteng, muntjac and wild pig populations have declined by 89%, 65% and 15% respectively. The study also showed very low encounter rates of eld's deer, gaur and sambar.

Wildlife consumption and trade also bring humans into close contact with wildlife, for example at marketplaces and restaurants, and increase the risk of zoonotic transmission. Eating wild meat not only expose people to serious health risks, but also create conditions for possible zoonotic spillover all along the supply chain, through hunting, poaching, transporting, storing, trading, processing and selling wild meat.

Most consumers are unaware of the potential risk they are exposing themselves, their loved ones, and society to when they purchase wild meat. As estimated, some 60% of emerging infectious diseases, similar to or even more serious than COVID-19, that are reported globally are zoonoses. Serious outbreaks, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), swine flu (H1N1), avian flu (H5N1), are all zoonotic diseases, meaning they were transmitted from animals to humans.

The Zero Wild Meat campaign launched today, by the Ministry of Environment, Mondulkiri Provincial Administration, Forestry Administration Cantonment, WWF and partners, aims to stop the consumption and trafficking of wildlife meat and encourage people to pledge their commitment to #ZeroWildMeat through this website: www.zerowildmeat.org The effort is a part of the Zero-Snaring campaign designed to transform people's preference and attitude in wildlife consumption in order to conserve wildlife and protect public health from future pandemic risks.

“It is time for all wild meat lovers and traders to make a positive change to stop wildlife consumption or trade, and in return to protect wildlife and natural resources as a way of contributing to economic and tourism development, as well as for the benefit of the local and global ecosystems,” **His Excellency Neth Pheaktra** said.



It is the duty of all of us to join hands in combatting the illegal wildlife trade and achieving Zero Wild Meat. Addition to raising public awareness, engaging stakeholders and strengthening law enforcement, the Ministry of Environment and partners also focus on developing local economies by providing alternative livelihoods to increase households' income and reduce pressures on natural resources. The participation of all stakeholders in the Cambodian society is critical to achieve our shared goal of safeguarding wild animals in their natural habitats for economic benefits through ecotourism development while continuing to protect the biodiverse ecosystems in Cambodia's protected areas.

The Zero Wild Meat campaign will pilot for six weeks in October and November 2022 and will engage with all 32 restaurants and food selling outlets in Monduliri to pledge their commitment to #ZeroWildMeat and spread the awareness.

"It is important that all buyers, sellers, traders and consumers understand about the health risks associated with consumption and trade activities, and adopt the zerowildmeat commitment," **Mr. Seng Teak** said.

"The provincial law enforcement measures such as the Monduliri's Circular No. 5 has contributed to reducing the availability of wildlife products and wild meat at the provincial markets and restaurants. But persistent demand threatens the survival of wildlife populations, fuels wildlife crime, and significantly poses the risk of zoonotic spillover from animals to people," said **His Excellency Chan Ratana**, Deputy Governor of Monduliri. "On behalf of the Monduliri Administration, I would like to urge people in Cambodia to say no to wild meat and join hands in safeguarding Cambodia's natural resources," he added.

Dr. Yi Sengdoeurn, Deputy Director of Communicable Disease Control Department of the Ministry of Health, said that One Health approach measures are important for protecting public health from current and future zoonotic risks. "We must work together to prevent the purchase, sale, transport and consumption of wildlife species which are of high risk for zoonotic disease transmission," he urged.

Jan Vertefeuille, senior advisor for advocacy at WWF-US, added, "While we may not be able to pinpoint the exact spot where the next outbreak is going to happen, we are able to identify behaviors, like eating wild meat, that increase the risk of zoonotic spillover. We hope consumers will join us to change their behavior and make wild meat consumption socially unacceptable. Reducing risky activities like this is the best way to try to prevent another pandemic."

"It is now time for collective action to urgently adopt innovative solutions to address the root causes of the wildlife decline and trade, and to put nature on the path to recovery," said **Mr. Ou Sopheakdey**, Chief of Monduliri Forestry Administration Cantonment.

The campaign will also distribute its key messages and call-to-action through social media channels to reach wider audiences across the country, while also organizing communications activities with Cambodian health experts to discuss public health risks from wildlife consumption. A similar zero bushmeat campaign is also launched in southeast Asian countries including in Viet Nam, Laos by WWF and partners like creative agency Vero and TwoWay PR who lend their support to the effort.

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