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Dear President Joko Widodo

Risks of Indonesia's wildlife and dog/cat meat trade to public health and safety

We are writing to you on behalf of the Dog Meat Free Indonesia (DMFI)¹ coalition to express our grave concerns regarding Indonesia's live animal markets and dog and cat meat trades in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the worsening situation of the pandemic globally and throughout Indonesia, with all 34 provinces now affected, the sale of wild animals including bats, rats, and reptiles alongside dogs and cats and other domesticated animals in markets throughout the country continues unchallenged. This is in defiance to ever-growing calls from governments, inter-governmental human and animal health experts and key stakeholders from around the world for the immediate closure of live animal markets globally.

It is shocking to see markets selling wildlife and domesticated animals in full operation – many of which are in densely-populated cities such as Jakarta, Medan and Manado – providing almost identical environments to those from which COVID-19 emerged, and potentially exposing thousands of people every day to a variety of zoonotic diseases throughout Indonesia.

Please take a few moments to view footage taken by the DMFI from North Sulawesi's live animal markets here: <https://bit.ly/3a1ZGiy>

Whilst the dog meat trade still operates in many provinces throughout Indonesia, DMFI investigations and research suggest that less than 7% of Indonesians consume dog or cat meat, and

¹ www.dogmeatfreeindonesia.org



only a very small minority of the population benefit from the trades. However, the dog and cat meat trades affect the entire nation, are proven to facilitate the transmission of deadly notifiable diseases such as rabies. The cat and dog meat trade relies on illegal operations and a lack of enforcement of existing laws and regulations in place to protect public health and safety, animal welfare, and prevent disease transmission.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has already explicitly highlighted the trade in dogs for human consumption as a contributing factor to the spread of rabies in Indonesia, and stated that 70 percent of global disease-causing pathogens discovered in the past 50 years came from animals.

The live animal markets found throughout Indonesia sell a variety of species, brutally trafficked across the country and imported into densely populated cities, under highly stressful conditions and in close confinement. It is impossible to ensure that meat sold at these markets is safe for human consumption, and given the unhygienic conditions, it is only a matter of time before the next deadly zoonotic disease emerges.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak emerged from Wuhan in late December 2019, the Chinese authorities have announced that the sale of all terrestrial wildlife for consumption would be prohibited nationwide; in addition, in April, the Chinese cities of Shenzhen and Zhuhai have introduced city-wide bans on dog and cat meat consumption, and the national government has publicly stated that dogs are considered companion animals not livestock, and should be removed from the list of animals considered “food”.

Trades that affect national and international welfare and stability can no longer be ignored or defended as personal choice or culture. Now is a critical time for countries around the world to review and reconsider their existing policies pertaining to the production/capture, sale, and slaughter of all animal species destined for human consumption, including dogs, cats and wildlife.

It is essential that governments around the world act to address the source of deadly zoonotic pathogens – known in the case of COVID-19 to be live animal markets where human and various species of animals are brought into close proximity – to ensure they are not the next point of origin for the next pandemic. If we do not act, the question is not whether another similar pandemic will emerge, but when. In light of the catastrophic impact of this pandemic, a precautionary approach is required to limit all risks. We therefore urge the Indonesian government to address the potential point of origin of novel zoonotic pathogens, such as COVID-19, within Indonesia.

Millions of dogs, cats and species of wildlife are being traded and slaughtered for consumption every year across the country, and in light of the serious public health threat that these trades pose, it is the responsibility of regional and national governments around the world to do everything in their power to mitigate sources of disease outbreaks. Thus, based on scientific evidence and expert



recommendations, we thereby urge the Indonesian government to take **urgent preventative measures** by:

- Ensuring the closure of all markets slaughtering or selling cats, dogs, and/or other illegal wildlife.
- Issuing a public statement regarding the public health dangers of slaughter and consumption of dogs, cats, and wildlife.
- Taking strong measures to ensure the enforcement of existing laws, regulations and directives to end the illegal trade in wildlife and the dog and cat meat trades, including the Directive issued in September 2018 calling on provincial and city governments to take action to tackle and discourage the dog and cat meat trade and consumption.

The Dog Meat Free Indonesia coalition stand by ready to assist.

Signed on behalf of the Dog Meat Free Indonesia coalition



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