

31 January 2022

Ms. Razan AL MUBARAK
President
International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
IUCN Headquarters
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland
Switzerland

CC: IUCN Council

Re: Concern regarding the Species Survival Commission (SSC) draft “Situation Analysis on the Roles and Risks of Wildlife in the Emergence of Human Infectious Diseases”

Dear President Al Mubarak and Members of the IUCN Council,

The undersigned IUCN members write to express several concerns about the draft “Situation Analysis on the Roles and Risks of Wildlife in the Emergence of Human Infectious Diseases” that was commissioned by the SSC, a draft executive summary of which was presented to the IUCN Council at its 11 August 2021 meeting. We have deep concerns about the content of the draft document, and we would like to know what procedures will be followed for review by the IUCN Membership; review and approval by the IUCN Council; and publication and external use of this document moving forward. From our perspective, the document and its messages therein do not appear to align with IUCN standards, processes or stated positions, and we seek your aid in remedying this situation.

First, clarity is needed around the process that has been followed and that will be followed in the future to fund, review and approve this document as an IUCN publication. It is our understanding that the document was reviewed by members of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) Steering Committee, but it is unclear the extent to which the comments of the SSC Steering Committee were addressed. Nevertheless, the draft has been cited in several intergovernmental meetings. The entire process is neither transparent, nor up to the usual IUCN standards.

The draft of the Situation Analysis and the executive summary of the document presented to the IUCN Council in August¹ indicate that the content is controversial, with serious concerns as to its being up to the usual high standards of IUCN, thus warranting close scrutiny under IUCN terms of reference prior to any publication and use by IUCN

¹ https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/c99_joint_documents_compressed_combined.pdf.

bodies.² However, while the document has not yet been finalized or approved, it is already in wide circulation; there are numerous references to the document and the IUCN name on the Internet.³ Also, a summary of the document carrying the IUCN, SSC, and World Conservation Congress logos was recently shared with Government and non-state members of a working group on wildlife and disease risk convened under the Standing Committee of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This is especially troubling given that the document has not been approved as an IUCN publication to our knowledge, or any external peer review, and was certainly not taken up, debated, or approved by the Members' Assembly in Marseille, or subsequently by the newly elected Council.

Moreover, while the situation analysis is not yet final, the conclusions it seeks to convey appear to conflict with established IUCN messaging on pathogen risk and wildlife, as well as a growing international body of peer-reviewed evidence on the origins, pathways and risks associated with pathogen spillover from wildlife. The IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) recognizes that “60% of zoonotic diseases originate from wild animals that come in contact with humans due to anthropogenic disturbances.”⁴ In its comments on the Situation Analysis provided to the IUCN Council, the CEM Chair expressed “concerns about some specific statements included in the report, for example that SARS- COV-2 may have an origin different than animals” noting that there are “strong evidences that indicate that SARS-COV-2 is a zoonotic disease.” Key messages and statements in the draft Situation Analysis and summaries are also contrary to the guidance and findings of many other intergovernmental bodies including UNEP, OIE, WHO, IPBES, and others. In short, we believe that the central messages of the draft Situation Analysis strain both scientific credibility and logic, which is something that must be addressed.

As members of IUCN, we care about the messages we convey and we want to ensure that IUCN's name and logo are used to promote credible and helpful conservation information to the world. It is clear that both the content and the process feeding into the Situation Analysis require clarity before the document can be considered worthy of IUCN. We hope you can ensure a thorough review and onboarding of comments from IUCN bodies and the IUCN membership given the gravity of this subject as we all suffer the consequences of a pandemic of likely zoonotic origins and experts predict another in a decade or less in this new “era of pandemics.”⁵ We believe that if this document is not

² [https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/5.1 - terms of reference for iucn ssc members 2021-2024-specialist group and task force chairs.pdf](https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/5.1_-_terms_of_reference_for_iucn_ssc_members_2021-2024-specialist_group_and_task_force_chairs.pdf)

³ See, e.g., https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wildlife_trade_risk_factors_singles.pdf

⁴ <https://www.iucn.org/commissions/commission-ecosystem-management/our-work/cems-thematic-groups/human-health-and-ecosystem-management>

⁵ IPBES (2020) Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Daszak, P., das Neves, C., Amuasi, J., Hayman, D., Kuiken, T., Roche, B., Zambrana-Torrel, C., Buss, P., Dundarova, H., Feferholtz, Y., Foldvari, G., Igbinosa, E., Junglen, S., Liu, Q., Suzan, G., Uhart, M., Wannous, C., Woolaston, K., Mosig Reidl, P., O'Brien, K., Pascual, U., Stoett, P., Li, H., Ngo, H. T., IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany, DOI:10.5281/zenodo.4147317

up to the high standards of IUCN, in transparency and scientific credibility, it should not be published.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and stand ready to assist you in any way to help ensure IUCN presents a well-grounded analysis of the role of wildlife in disease emergence.

Sincerely,

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Center for Biological Diversity
Earth League International
S.P.E.C.I.E.S
Thinking Animals United
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)
Earthday.org
Asociación Rescate y Conservación de Vida Silvestre (ARCAS Guatemala)
WILD Foundation
World Resources Institute (WRI)
Conservation X Labs
Center for Environmental Ethics and Law (CEEL)
Gallifrey Foundation
Groupe de Recherche et d'Action pour le Bien-Être au Bénin (GRABE-BENIN)
Born Free Foundation
Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC)
Association de Gestion des Ressources Naturelles et de la Faune de la Comoé-Léraba
(AGEREF-CL)
Namibian Chamber of Environment
Palmeirinha ONG
Freeland Foundation
Rede Nacional de Combate ao Tráfico de Animais Silvestres (RENCTAS)
The Corbett Foundation
Environment and Rural Development Foundation (ERUDEF)
Nature Tropicale
The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens