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One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
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March 23, 2020

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
World Health Organization
Avenue Appia 20
1211 Geneva

Dear Director-General Tedros:

I am writing to express my concern with the deep nexus between unsanitary “wet markets” and the outbreaks of novel diseases affecting global health. While I welcomed the announcement last month that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has permanently banned the trade and consumption of non-aquatic wild animals, I share the concerns of many in the conservation community that this ban does not go far enough. The policy does not ban the trade of wild animals for fur, medicine, or research, and I believe that these loopholes may be exploited to illegally sell or trade these animals. It is also important to note that the Chinese Communist Party is actively promoting Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as a response to COVID-19; TCM is a known driver of wildlife trafficking.

As you know, the epicenter of the current novel coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19, is suspected to be a wet market in Wuhan, China. While the animal host that facilitated the transfer of COVID-19 from bats to humans has not yet been identified, pangolins, which are traded in this market, are suspected. The wet market in Wuhan, as well as others throughout China, bring an array of animals and humans in close contact with each other, and facilitated the spread of the disease to humans. This is similar to the 2002-2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) coronavirus that likely originated in a similar wet market. In that case, the coronavirus passed from bats to masked palm civets before making the jump to humans. While wet markets exist throughout the world, the ones found in China are particularly concerning because of their incorporation of wildlife.

Officials from the PRC that are attempting to obfuscate the origins of the coronavirus must be clearly and quickly reprimanded by the World Health Organization (WHO). As you have stated, the world is enduring a pandemic and I am deeply troubled by the PRC’s erosion of the global

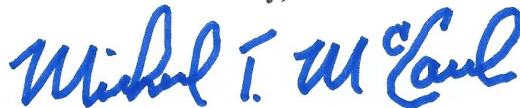
understanding of how this pandemic came to be. Further, their efforts are likely to impair the best possible response to the next outbreak originating from China. Unfortunately, the world has suffered from several unique diseases originating from China, including SARS, avian flu, and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The PRC is putting politics above health. It is incumbent on the WHO to be a voice of truth, and not allow Communist propaganda to inhibit our ability to safeguard the lives of billions around the world. I understand that a decade ago the WHO signed a tripartite agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) in order to combat health threats associated with interactions between humans, animals and the environment. I believe that the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the dire need for this work and urge you to continue cooperating with your counterparts to prevent further zoonotic diseases outbreaks from the trade, sale, and consumption of wild animals.

As the global community continues to bear the burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO must state unequivocally the public health risks resulting from these wet markets. I urge you to work with the PRC and other countries with similar systems of trading and selling wildlife to end these practices for the health and protection of our communities. It is completely unacceptable for a developed and technologically sophisticated country such as China – with deep connections to global commerce and travel – to continue these types of markets in an unsanitary manner.

I call on the WHO to work with these countries to ensure the sanitization of these markets and take all other necessary actions to prevent future spillover events. Although there may be cultural sensitivities associated with these markets, the WHO has a responsibility to provide education on the science-based health risks and other assistance. I stand ready to assist you with your efforts.

Sincerely,



Michael T. McCaul
Ranking Republican Member