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## Preventing the next pandemic: Zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission

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Statement by Inger Andersen, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme

Thank you for joining us for the launch of a [new report by the UN Environment Programme and the International Livestock Research Institute](#). The report is about the wider issue of zoonotic diseases, such as COVID-19, and how to minimize them.

So, what does the report tell us?

COVID-19 is one of the worst zoonotic diseases, but it is not the first. Ebola, SARS, MERS, HIV, Lyme disease, Rift Valley fever and Lassa fever preceded it. In the last century we have seen at least six major outbreaks of novel coronaviruses. Sixty per cent of known infectious diseases and 75 per cent of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic. Over the last two decades and before COVID-19, zoonotic diseases caused economic damage of USD 100 billion.

Tragically, two million people in low- and middle-income countries die each year from neglected endemic zoonotic diseases – such as anthrax, bovine tuberculosis and rabies. These are often communities with complex development problems, high dependence on livestock and proximity to wildlife.

Growth in humanity and its activity is largely to blame. Meat production has increased by 260 per cent in 50 years. We have intensified agriculture, expanded infrastructure and extracted resources at the expense of our wild spaces. Dams, irrigation and factory farms are linked to 25 per cent of infectious diseases in humans. Travel, transport and food supply chains have erased borders and distances. Climate change has contributed to the spread of pathogens.

The end result is that people and animals, with the diseases they carry, are closer than ever.

There are many solutions, which will also help to fight climate change and biodiversity loss. We need to invest in ending the over-exploitation of wildlife and other natural resources, farming sustainably, reversing land degradation and protecting ecosystem health.

Part of this process is the urgent adoption of integrated human, animal and environmental health expertise and policy – a One Health approach. One Health is not new, but uneven uptake and institutional support means it hasn't hit its potential. The weakest link in the chain is environmental health. We have to fix this.

We were warned that the current pandemic was a matter of if, not when. It is a human failing that we predict but not prepare. Now we must become more proactive to avoid another pandemic and address endemic zoonotic diseases. This means recognizing that human health, animal health and planetary health cannot be separated, and planning our responses accordingly.



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