

Esteemed colleagues, I am honored to speak on behalf of the NGO Major Group as a representative of the organization ACTAsia.

We must not forget that COVID-19 was transmitted to humans by the capture and consumption of wild animals. Emergency bans on the commercial wildlife trade should be kept in effect, coupled with community support and investment in alternative livelihoods, and remaining trades such as trophy hunting and wildlife farming abolished. These uses cannot in good conscience be considered safe or sustainable. Restoring ecosystems through initiatives like 30 by 30 will reduce zoonotic disease transmission due to habitat loss and forced human-animal contact, along with preserving biodiversity, improving ecosystem services, and – if done equitably – promoting the rights and tenure of Indigenous people. We must address the root causes of zoonotic disease transmission to prevent future pandemics.

How we treat life on land impacts other goals as well, as acknowledged in the U.N. Environmental Assembly's recent resolution on the nexus between animal welfare, the environment, and sustainable development. Promoting solutions including regenerative agriculture and local and plant-based diets will produce more sustainable food systems while also freeing land for restoration.

There is evidence that childhood exposure to animals and nature and teaching of humane values can increase social skills and reduce violent behaviors. This carries crucial implications for education, gender equality, and peace and security. We encourage member states and other stakeholders to consider such interconnections in their efforts to realize SDG 15. Thank you.