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PRESS RELEASE

Human health linked to health of animals and the environment confirm experts at EU-India webinar on 'Bio-diversity means Health'

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Connecting the global priorities of biodiversity and human health is not only prudent but it is a form of long- term insurance for community resilience and the well-being of future generations. And this lesson is ever more valid today as we face COVID-19 pandemic across the globe. This was the message from global experts gathered at a virtual workshop on "*Biodiversity means Health: from virus to vultures.*"

The webinar was organised by the Delegation of the European Union in India as part of a communication series in advance of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-15) to be held in Kunming, China in October this year.

The Ambassador of the European Union to India, **H.E. Mr Ugo Astuto**, in his opening remarks, said: "Protection of biodiversity features high in EU India cooperation. The EU India Leaders Meeting on 8th of May reconfirmed our shared commitment to urgently address the interdependent challenges of climate change, bio-diversity, and pollution. We want to contribute to developing and implementing the ambitious and transformational post 2020 framework to be agreed at the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15)". "The global endeavour to protect biodiversity must involve not just governments but all stake-holders. Civil society, academia and private sector shall come together and help to slow down and reverse the massive destruction of ecosystem which has been going on the planet," he added.

In his keynote speech, **Mr Atul Chaturvedi**, Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, stated that health of human beings is intrinsically related to the health of animals and the environment. He said this interconnectedness, referred to as One Health, has led to a new inter-disciplinary approach to disease control to mitigate existing and emerging zoonotic diseases. "Pathogens in animals threaten both animal and human health. There is a need to work in collaboration with all relevant sectors and institutions especially veterinary and forest departments so that animal diseases outbreak may provide an early warning for zoonotic disease outbreaks in humans. Studies indicate that more than two thirds of existing and emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic which can be transferred from animals to humans and vice versa. In fact, with the global burden of 2.5 billion cases of infection and 2.7 million human deaths worldwide each year, zoonotic diseases constitute almost 60% of known infection diseases and up to 75% of new infectious diseases," Mr. Chaturvedi added. Controlling zoonotic pathogens at their animal source is not only important for animal health outcome it is also the most effective and economic way of protecting people from future pandemics.

Elaborating on the One Health framework he said the idea is to strengthen systemic capacity to better manage animal health and to reduce disease incidents at national level, and in selected focus states through infrastructural capacity building interventions. Institutionalizing one health concept

would include strengthening field functionaries at all levels including diagnostic laboratories, and to support veterinary services with a focus on high risk and underserved areas. Animal health surveillance will be strengthened through IT platform under development though national digital livestock mission called Life Stack.

Mr Chaturvedi also mentioned an upcoming EU-supported project to work together to fight anti-microbial resistance (AMR) in Asia. AMR has attained serious proportions to the extent that we are heading towards a post-anti-biotic era.

The virtual workshop saw an animated discussion amongst global experts put together by B4Life Facility Lead Expert, **Mr Conrad Aveling**. **Ms Cristina Romanelli**, World Health Organisation (WHO) and a co-author of the WHO report Biodiversity and Human Health State of Knowledge review (available here: <https://www.cbd.int/health/stateofknowledge/>) in her presentation covered the direct and indirect causes of bio-diversity loss. She mentioned that natural ecosystem had declined by 47% over average relative to their earliest estimated states. She explained how climate change, pollution, invasive alien species, demographic and socio-cultural changes, economic and technological changes, institutions and governance lead to infectious epidemics, but also non communicable diseases such as allergies or cancers, as well as mental health issues. She said 23% of all global untimely deaths could be prevented by better managing the environment. Land use change, agricultural expansion and urbanisation cause more than 30% of emerging disease events. She called for global leadership to institute integrated approaches that take care of linking human and animal health benefits to better environmental management.

Other experts who spoke at the event were **Prof. Terry Sunderland**, Professor at the Department of Forest & Conservation Sciences, University of British Columbia, Canada; **Prof. Jeroen Douwes**, Professor of Public Health and Director of the Research Centre for Hauora and Health at Massey University, New Zealand, **Dr. David Wilkie**, Director of Conservation Measures for the Wildlife Conservation Society, USA, and **Dr. Unnikrishnan Payyappalli** of Transdisciplinary University, Bengaluru.

Dr Michael Bucki, and **Mr Benoit Sauveroche**, Counsellors at the Delegation of the European Union, welcomed the speakers and gave the background and context. The former outlined possible next steps and recalled that further events on different aspect of bio-diversity will be held in the coming weeks.

Further details at: <https://leadthegreenchange.in/event/biodiversity-means-health/>

Press enquiries: Poonam.kapila@eeas.europa.eu 9910822339