

One Health Alliance of South Asia (OHASA) Bengal Declaration

We, delegates of the inaugural meeting of the One Health Alliance of South Asia (OHASA), including scientists from Bangladesh and India together with Wildlife Trust, respectfully call upon the governments of Bangladesh and India to tackle the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases shared among wildlife, domestic animals and humans. These diseases are increasing in frequency. They transcend national boundaries and cause significant morbidity and mortality – affecting our livelihoods and leading to severe economic disruption. We recognize that the underlying causes of these diseases are linked to changes in our own populations, our activities, and the changes we make to the environment. These include the trade in wildlife, habitat changes such as deforestation and fragmentation, changes in demography and socio-economic factors, exotic species introductions, and other forms of global environmental change.

Emerging zoonotic diseases affect humans, domestic animals and wildlife, irrespective of geographic and political boundaries. We therefore believe that a concerted, united effort initially between our two governments, and ultimately among the other South Asian nations, as well as the non-governmental agencies active in this field at home and abroad, will better prepare us to face the challenges ahead. We call for this international partnership to expand our technical capacity to identify these diseases rapidly using highly sensitive molecular techniques, to develop methods to control their spread and immediately communicate to the susceptible concerned countries. This approach will ultimately allow us to predict and prevent their occurrence. The One Health paradigm recognizes that human health and animal health are inextricably linked, and seeks to improve and protect the health and well-being of all species. The One Health approach promotes cooperation and collaboration among scientists including physicians, veterinarians, epidemiologists, public health professionals, ecologists, natural resource managers and allied health scientists, thereby promoting strengths in leadership and management to achieve these goals.

The following declaration calls upon the governments, the international donor community, national and international non-governmental organizations, and human, animal and ecosystem health sciences to recognize and support the OHASA initiative unanimously approved by the delegates participating in the inaugural meeting of the “South Asian Trans-boundary Conservation Medicine-One Health Network” held at Chalsa, West Bengal, India, 4-6 November 2009. We hold the following to be critical challenges:

Whereas emerging zoonotic diseases are increasing in frequency, transcending national boundaries, devastating species and causing significant morbidity and mortality and thereby, negatively impacting livelihoods as well as causing severe economic disruption;
Whereas the underlying causes of these diseases are linked to anthropogenic factors including changes in demography, socio-economic factors, habitat

fragmentation/destruction, the wildlife trade, exotic species introductions, globalization, and global environmental change;

Whereas we recognize that human, animal and ecosystem health are inextricably linked and propose that this effort should be based upon the 'One Health' paradigm, which promotes collaboration among human medicine, veterinary medicine and the ecological sciences;

Whereas the only approach to detect, diagnose, prevent and even predict zoonotic emerging diseases require the collaboration of many disciplines, institutions and individuals of both countries involving those communities closely dependent on domestic animals, wildlife and other natural resources;

Whereas many international and national institutions have allocated resources to combat, control and in some instances prevent emerging zoonotic diseases such as West Nile virus infection, SARS, H5N1 highly pathogenic influenza and H1N1 pandemic influenza, allocating billions of dollars to these efforts yet did not adequately devote resources to the prediction and prevention of these diseases prior to their epidemic spread;

Whereas international and national agencies have primarily focused their resources on livestock and human disease surveillance, rather than wildlife disease surveillance which is necessary for the early detection of zoonotic pathogens, before they spill over to domestic animals and humans;

Now, therefore, be resolved that the OHASA delegates, Wildlife Trust and collaborating institutions urge the governments of India and Bangladesh and ultimately other countries of South Asia whose governments are contemplating allocating personnel, resources, and technical support to the implementation of multi-national programs that will specifically target the identification, characterization, prevention, control and prediction of emerging zoonotic diseases in that region. These collaborations and support can be accomplished by:

Signing a Memorandum of Understanding between relevant agencies/ministries including the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry/ Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock and Ministry of Forest and Environment and associated agencies that will create a communication network to report emerging zoonotic disease surveillance results and coordinate response activities;

Establishing an Interagency Task Force (ITF) that meets between the governments that will be responsible for the development of standardized reporting guidelines and protocols both within and between government agencies. The ITF will organize joint surveillance teams (Emergency Preparedness Plan & Rapid Response Teams) that include Bangladeshi and Indian scientists working together on outbreaks, wildlife die-offs or proactive collection of wildlife and domestic animal specimens for surveillance purposes. In addition, the ITF will designate one of the existing agencies/ministries as the agency responsible for information sharing and dissemination (i.e. Indian and Bangladeshi border security forces currently meet on a monthly basis to discuss border issues)

Creating a network of diagnostic laboratories in India and Bangladesh that will test wildlife samples for zoonotic pathogens. These labs should meet GLP and international standards or be certified by international agencies (i.e. OIE, CDC, WHO). These laboratories will engage in technology transfer and capacity building between the two countries. In addition, these laboratories will assist in testing samples from other South Asian countries where lab facilities are unavailable and will share samples with laboratories in other South Asia countries. These activities will encourage the establishment of regional reference laboratories for wildlife disease diagnostics, a critical element in facing emerging disease challenges in South Asia;

Promoting the investigation of all wildlife disease outbreaks and establishing a real-time, web-based disease reporting mechanism within the Forestry/Wildlife Ministries to liaise with the Agricultural and Public Health Ministries that can easily provide resource managers, animal disease specialists, veterinary diagnostic laboratories, physicians, public health workers, and government officers with access to data on wildlife diseases, mortality events, and other relevant information. This surveillance system could be similar to existing systems (i.e. NBII Wildlife Disease Information Node, OIE reporting system, Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre Reports);

Allocating government funds, and funds from other national and international non-governmental agencies to support this research in emergent zoonotic disease surveillance; these funds can be disbursed to scientists of different disciplines through a competitive grant process, cooperative agreements or inter-institutional collaborations that will prioritize zoonotic agents on the basis of their pathogenicity, impacts and economic burden

Establishing One Health programs at relevant institutions to enhance public health effectiveness, increase understanding of the impact of anthropogenic changes on the emergence of new pathogens of animal and human origin, and accelerating biomedical research discoveries. This should emphasize local capacity building from the community to the professional levels in the One Health paradigm

Enhancing public health education through public outreach campaigns and professional workshops and seminars that use the One Health paradigm to bridge disciplines and increase general awareness of the links among human, animal, and ecosystem health.

That all professions related to human, livestock and wildlife health, and the social and environmental sciences should understand the importance of the “one health” approach and work together. This transdisciplinary approach should be taken for surveillance and research of emerging zoonotic pathogens. That all health professionals, government and local people be made aware about this holistic approach and regulatory matters addressed in the "one health" paradigm encouraging the establishment of a regulatory body to address and foster the mitigation of emerging zoonoses.