

Dear WOAHA focal points for wildlife

Esteemed experts from the WOAHA Collaborating Centres in Kenya, South Africa and the United States

Representatives of partner organisations and regional economic communities,

Dear WOAHA colleagues from offices in Bamako, Gaborone, Paris and Nairobi,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Dr Karim Tounkara, the Regional Representative for Africa and on behalf of Dr Monique Eloit, WOAHA Director General, it is my pleasure to share a few thoughts with you about what we will be experiencing in the next three days.

My first reflection relates to the fact that 12 years after the first ever training of WOAHA focal points for wildlife in Arusha, we are back in the same town for this 6th round of training. Indeed the first training took place from 17 – 19 March 2010 in Arusha.

The idea has always been to train every category of focal point every two years. For many categories we have failed to achieve this rhythm, but as you can see for yourselves, 12 years after the first training we are now organising the sixth cycle, which means that we have been able to successfully keep the pace of training of this particular category of focal points throughout the years. I would even state that we have done one better, especially if we take into consideration the intermediate cycle training webinar that was organised in 2021 during the middle of the pandemic. The last face-to-face training courses, it's the 5th cycle, took place in Kasane, Botswana, in November 2018 and in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in March 2019, for our French-speaking focal points.

My second consideration is of course linked to the pandemic and it cannot be a coincidence that this is probably one of the first focal point trainings that is being organised face to face, post-pandemic, given the tremendous changes in mindsets and attitudes regarding wildlife, wildlife biodiversity, wildlife health and wildlife trade that we have seen since 2019. It is crucial to emphasise the role of anthropogenic changes in exposing humans to wildlife pathogens that are considered natural components of ecosystems. If I tell you that this sixth cycle training course was prepared mid - 2019 to be implemented in Arusha mid - 2020 and was of course cancelled or at least postponed, I also need to tell you that the programme that we had prepared in 2019 had become completely obsolete by the time we started working on this 2022 edition. We had to start from scratch, again. I therefore hope that after almost a year of preparation you will find this training course not just useful, but

instrumental in the way we now look at all these interfaces that we tend to lump together as One Health.

I'm particularly proud of all those focal points who took time out of their busy schedules to join the two webinars that were organised in the course of November to bring our focal points up to speed on the latest developments since the end of 2019. At the same time, I am also disappointed that only half of the focal points in the room today took part in these webinars.

Because these webinars are not attended by the wider public, but only by few, select invited focal points and representatives of partner organisations, there are no economies of scale to be made and every focal point who chooses not to attend those webinars contributes to increasing its cost to the organisation.

My third and last - I promise - consideration is regarding the involvement of focal points in both the webinars and today's workshop. When it comes to wildlife focal points in Africa, there are no masters and no apprentices. You are all experts in your own field, in your own country, for these species that you work with and the diseases that they spread or that they suffer from. Therefore please don't see this workshop as a top-down, talking-down-to-you event, but a genuine attempt for mutual learning, with you, from you, through the presentations that you will be making this week, whether you're a focal point from Wakanda or a professor from a Collaborating Centre in the United States.

This allows me to greet this professor from the Collaborating Centre in the United States who is attending this meeting from a distance : welcome Jonathan Sleeman. Welcome to his colleagues LeAnn White and Dan Walsh, our colleagues from the Pretoria-based Collaborating Centre, Claude Sabeta and Johann Steyl, without forgetting our third Collaborating Centre, on bee health in Africa, ICIPE, here represented by Kiatoko Nkoba, thank you also to Julius Nziza who will provide us with a first overview presentation on the work that Gorilla Doctors has been doing in Rwanda and Uganda under the One Health approach.

I want to end by acknowledging the considerable support of our financial partners : the Government of Australia and the European Union through the EBO-SURSY project.

I thank you