

PREZODE Workshop 6th October 2023

Belgian One World One Health vision towards the prevention of the emergence of zoonotic disease

Minister Khattabi

Minister of Climate, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Green Deal

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking the Belgian Prezode network, for the many valuable efforts they have put into this draft document with policy recommendations. It is really with great regret that I cannot attend this third Workshop on a Belgian One World One Health Vision for the prevention of zoonotic disease emergence.

Your work is of high importance both for the environment as well as our human health, as the most effective strategy to maintain health and well-being is prevention. It is an old saying, but it is true; “Prevention is better than the cure”. The role of a healthy environment, including the importance of biodiversity and climate, therefore cannot be overestimated.

A clear example is the Covid-19 pandemic. While predicted for a long time by many scientists, it marked a turning point. Not only the economy, and our health systems but also our private lives were dramatically disrupted.

Although no longer a true crisis, Covid-19 has become a part of our daily life. Nevertheless, the risk of new pandemics keeps growing. It is in between crises that we need to prepare to better handle the next crisis, or even better: prevent the next crisis.

As a strong advocate of the “One World One Health” principle, which reaffirms the crucial link between the health of people, animals and the environment, I am pleased to note the growing recognition of the need to address the root causes of pandemics.

PREZODE, ‘PREventing ZOonotic Disease Emergence’, is a good example of this new more holistic way of thinking. It is an important initiative since it proposes a paradigm shift from response to

deep prevention. Prevention at the level of the drivers, such as deforestation, and at the level of spill-over events, such as the sale and consumption of bushmeat.

PREZODE fits into the broader picture of the “One World One Health” approach, by integrating the environmental and climate change dimensions within health and health systems.

We know that high biological diversity slows down the spread of diseases. The global mass extinction in wild animals and flora and the destruction of ecosystems is a negative trend that should urgently be reversed.

But we are taking steps in the right direction.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted in December 2022, aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

The recent IPBES report on invasive alien species was approved only a few weeks ago by 146 governments worldwide. It highlighted that existing collaborative and multisectoral approaches such as “One Health” can provide frameworks for cross-disciplinary thinking and contribute to solutions of environmental issues like biological invasions.

However, implementation is often a challenge. I therefore really thank you for all the work you have been doing so far to achieve a sustainable environment and to build a Belgian One World, One Health vision.

I have followed closely the workshops organized to prepare the policy recommendations that I requested, jointly with my colleagues at ministerial level. I am looking forward to the results and wish you a successful final workshop.