



## **Masks do not make us blind**

**Let's not go back to the normalcy that led us to the pandemic.**

**To protect others, we need the real vaccine: the Change. In political, economic and lifestyle choices.**

We all have a responsibility to make sure that the masks we have had to put on our mouths and noses during these weeks and again in the coming weeks do not cover our eyes. Nor should they tie hard the hands of those who should make important and urgent decisions. The causes of this human disaster are in front of us. And they are crystal clear.

Coronavirus originated in China from the exploitation of animals in the form of bats kidnapped and killed to be sold in a market. In Italy, Coronavirus has spread more intensely in those provinces with the highest concentration of intensive farm animals and air pollution, which is considered by many to be the vector that facilitated the spread of the virus and, in itself, destroyer of human immune defenses. This happened despite the fact that these provinces were thought to have the best health systems .

Most of pandemics and epidemics which have affected humans in this and in the past century, have developed from animals which have been increasingly poached and treaded for so many reasons (species trafficking is one of the most common crimes worldwide): from cuisine to entertainment, from labs to indoor captivity, with less and less natural living space such as forests, devoured by the deforestation, partly caused by the production of feed for other animals, those in industrial farms.. According to FAO, there are 60 billion animals every year that are kept in incredible crowded conditions, in production plants, transforming living things into object, machines to produce more and more meat, eggs and milk. We are talking about animals which can exist just with the use - in Italy alone - of 70% of the total antibiotics sold, as reported by the latest European Medicines Agency (EMA) report. The latter reports the incredible loss of around 10,000 human casualties per year in Italy alone by antibiotic resistance (compared to a total of 33,000 in Europe) and hundreds of millions of euros spent in related social and medical intervention. This mistreatment allowed viruses such as Sars, Mers, H1N1 swine flu, H5N1 avian flu, H7N2 to move from species to species (to spillover).

Already in 2004, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reported an increase in demand for animal proteins and the intensification of their industrial production as the main causes of the appearance and spread of new, unknown zoonotic diseases, i.e. new diseases transmitted from animals to humans. According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) *"around 75% of the new diseases that have affected humans in the last decade have been transmitted from animals or products of animal origin"*. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) highlights an alarming increase of zoonoses in recent years, which are in turn related to the rapid destruction of ecosystems, deforestation and wild species trafficking, and are amplified by the intensification of factory farming and climate change. *"The 2016 report estimated about 2 billion people*

*affected and 2 million casualties per year by zoonoses alone. And all this before the appearance of Coronavirus” states the UNEP. “The reason? Pathogens have had so many opportunities to move from wild and captive animals to people like ever before”.* Then again, how can we forget the bats for Ebola, the great monkeys victims of hunting because of the creation of the AIDS, the birds of West Nile Disease, the "mad cows" of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy, the crisis produced by the salmonella DT104 , the one caused by the Escherichia Coli O157, the blue tongue of the sheep ... Italy, and the whole World, is full, cyclically, of "red zones", and this is due substantially due to the ill-treatment of the animals. Last April, on days of national health emergency, in the Treviso province some turkey farms have been declared as outbreak hotspots of avian *influenza*, fortunately enough with low pathogenicity. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, the coronavirus developed from men to animals among mink fur farms.

Focusing action against Covid-19 by emergency means which do not tackle the root causes of the epidemic is a mistake with dramatic consequences. It will not be a vaccine that will solve the problem definitively. The main hazard we are facing is to consider the new coronavirus as a single episode, an isolated phenomenon. The pandemic which devastates us is an effective definition of catastrophe, somewhere in between epidemiology and political economy. Its starting point is firmly anchored in the tragic effects of the industrialisation of the food cycle, particularly in livestock farming, and of the cultural consumerist drift we are facing.

Other than the intrinsic biological features of Coronavirus itself, its spread has hinged on the effects of decades of policies dramatically eroding the social infrastructures that help sustain life. In this vicious circle, public health systems have been particularly affected by a dramatic lack of resources and staff. On the other hand, scientism and research for its own sake have been far from preventing the pandemic, fuelling trade in wild and exotic species or even creating chemical or genetically modified organisms.

In the course of the emergency, political and scientific authorities have asserted that is the people are the primary contagion vectors. Our lockdown was performed as the most vital exercise of citizenship. However, we need to be able to take things further.

The other lesson we need to learn is that the way we live on this planet, our unprecedented domination on other species, has strong consequences, negative consequences and some of those take the form of a Covid-19 pandemic. It is not something that simply happened to us. It is the result of the things we do, the choices we make. We are all responsible for it. The main risk is to think of the Coronavirus as an isolated phenomenon, without history, without social, economic or cultural context. It is not normal to go back to when what we made "common", "normal" yesterday led us to the emergency condition of today.

The interests of a few have been privileged against the common good. Adding to political, economic and everyday consumption choices a system of prevention reduced to a minimum over the decades, a national healthcare system that continues to relegate the fundamental Veterinary Medicine to the background, the result – tragic - is this.

We believe that we all have a responsibility to ensure that the masks that we have had to put on our mouths in recent weeks do not also cover the necessary words, the acts that are essential for the change in Italian and European regulation as well as global international agreements. The changes in the economy and in the lifestyles of all of us. So that, in one, three or ten years from now, a new pandemic will not happen again.

We deluded ourselves to be healthy in a sick world. That's why we don't want to go back to the world we were in before, to the world that caused the pandemic. A world that with a drug or a vaccine can't wait to file this incident away, as soon as possible, to make everything go back to the way it was before.

The bad news is that we have created all this... the good news is the same. Since we created all this we can, we must, change. Do not think that we can solve everything by closing a wet-market on the other side of the world. Coronavirus was not the first pandemic caused by animal abuse. The reality is far from it. There have been many silent diseases. But we want this to be the last.

There will be no social justice, will not exist a real "restart" button, if we do not look beyond the short-sighted boundaries of our species. We must distance ourselves, yes, but from selfishness and indifference. We need to create a new alliance between humans, other animals, and the Planet.

A society without discrimination, based on species diversity is a model of coexistence and it is the solution. Each of us must do his or her own. We owe it to the countless deaths, to the people who are still fighting the disease. Ultimately, we owe it to the victims of every species caused by a callous system that will either change now or die with us.

1. Let us begin, because we can do it simply starting from us. By our conscious choices. **Our daily choices like food. Directing ourselves to vegetable foods** will be our best action against the next epidemics ensuring, *inter alia*, food for all.
2. **Companies must be refounded** basing on real sustainability criteria which are not - like "animal welfare" - just a slogan. Even by taking the real Social Responsibility, the State should also signal its intentions, for instance through a differentiated taxation system.
3. Regulatory interventions are needed at national, European and global level - even with a real "New Green Deal" and "2030 Biodiversity Strategy" - to **stop trade, markets, trade fairs, "ready to shoot" breeding, the killing of wild and exotic animals**. The stop of hunting activities in Italy, the related "wet markets" and the prohibition of hunting-tourism of Italians when traveling abroad.

Not just a meter, but miles and miles there must be between us and these animals. They must be in our proximity only for the necessary rescue or for the impossibility of reintroduction into nature. No more capture and reproduction to make food, entertainment, captivity, skins and furs, experimentation, thereby transforming the current CITES, the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species, into a new international agreement of broad ban, strengthening national and international bodies, Police Forces, for the prevention and repression of illegalities. Closure of the last twenty Italian mink clothing farms.

4. **Stop to public funding for zootechnics** (between March and May alone, 14.5 million euros were allocated for the pig, sheep and buffalo sectors, adding to the 100 million euros of the Decree Law "Cura Italia" for the breeding and fishing sector) and the "environmentally damaging subsidies" catalogued by the Ministry of the Environment, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the EU Strategy "From farm to fork" to reflect the real market costs for animal productions; promotion of vegetable proteins by decreasing VAT from 22% to 4% also for non-animal "milk" and by making entirely vegetable meals from 1 to at least 7 every 14 days in the new "Minimum Environmental Standards" of collective catering in force starting August 2020.

5. **Human-based scientific research needs to be supported**, experimentation with forward-looking methods based on alternative technologies should be acknowledged at least as a first step towards an effective "freedom of research" and incentives should be given to disease prevention and the preparation of disease management plans with the necessary protection devices.
  
6. **Animal protection is also important to promote action on social issues and new poverty phenomena**. Coronavirus has made many people discover the importance of living with a dog or a cat. The elder, families and all the people in general, must be encouraged to adopt pets by creating an incentive for responsible adoptions and for the most vulnerable groups already living with a dog or cat, or for those who adopt from shelters or from the street, a "Quattrozampe Social Card" of vouchers for food and veterinary expenses, providing for the cancellation of VAT by law, which astonishingly considers them "luxury goods", increasing tax deductibility of food and veterinary expenses and intervening on the prices and sale of veterinary drugs that cost up to fifteen times more than those for human use for the same molecule.