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Welcome Note: Federal Ministries

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Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

I am delighted to speak to you today on behalf of the Federal Environment Ministry and the five other federal ministries involved in the One Health research agreement.

Two years ago, the well-regarded German Research Platform for Zoonoses became the One Health Platform, broadening its focus beyond human and animal health to include environmental health. This was the right decision. The Platform involves six federal ministries –Health, Agriculture, Research and Technology, Economic Cooperation, Environment and Defence. I would like to thank the staff of the Zoonoses Platform office and the members of the Scientific Advisory Board, who have been instrumental in facilitating the transition to the new platform. Their experience and expertise lay the groundwork for managing and improving the new platform. Your work on the One Health Platform is invaluable. The Platform's research agenda shows that you are already putting the principles of the One Health approach into practice.

At a time when we are facing global challenges such as pandemics, pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss, it is essential that we take an integrated view of human, animal and environmental health. And underscore the importance of One Health as an integral part of our political and scientific agenda. One good example of how human and animal health and the environment are closely interconnected is climate change: its far-reaching impacts are already being felt today but will become even more serious in future. Higher temperatures are negatively affecting human and animal health, and diseases once rarely seen at our latitudes are now spreading. And the impacts of climate change on the environment affect humans and animals, too – for example water scarcity –a problem compounded by increased pollution.

As a result of insights like this, the One Health approach has gained in importance in recent years, making its way into policies at national, European and international level. I would like to outline this briefly.

At international level is the WHO Pandemic Agreement, which was concluded after lengthy and difficult negotiations. Article 5 explicitly references One Health, attesting to the importance of this approach. One Health is also firmly established in international environmental protection and climate action. For example, One Health has been included on the agenda of the next major climate conference this year, COP30, and in the WHO Global Action Plan on Climate Change and Health.

The G7 and G20 countries have also recognised the importance of the One Health approach in relation to human health, agriculture and the environment. In their most recent communiqués, the G7 and G20 emphasised the need to strengthen health systems around the world, in line with the One Health approach. We know from experience how important this is, because pandemics and pollution know no borders and require a coordinated international response.

Finally, the Danish EU Council Presidency has also included One Health on its agenda. A high-level stakeholder conference on the One Health strategy is planned with the European Commission for December. It will promote an integrated view of health, veterinary and environmental aspects with the aim of increasing resilience.

At European level, the German government participates in various European partnerships that put the One Health approach at the centre of their research activities. Three partnerships have recently been launched or are about to begin: the European Partnership on One Health Antimicrobial Resistance, the BE READY NOW partnership for pandemic preparedness and the Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare. The first two aim to further strengthen interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary cooperation through European research projects over the next seven years.

The German government also supports the IAEA's Rays of Hope initiative, which targets healthcare systems for radiation medicine in low- and middle-income countries. This transfer of expertise and technology will make modern radiotherapy applications available to treat cancer, for example, in line with the overarching goals of One Health.

In Germany, the One Health approach is now also established in policymaking and research. Some ministries have set up divisions to focus on One Health, giving rise to various strategies, including one by the Federal Agriculture Ministry. One Health is also being addressed in subordinate authorities, such as the German Environment Agency, called UBA for short, which is part of my ministry. UBA has initiated a ministry-wide discussion process on how the approach can be integrated more fully into its own activities. It is currently setting up a strategic project group to advance this principle.

UBA firmly believes that the One Health approach can make an important contribution to achieving national and international sustainability goals and bringing about a green and socially just transition. Fundamental principles include the importance of respecting planetary boundaries and environmental justice.

And there is well-established dialogue between the ministries. All ministries are kept informed about ongoing activities, can coordinate their efforts, work together on issues and forge international contacts –most recently with the WHO, for example. One Health is also a component of various German government strategies, such as the German Sustainable Development Strategy, the National Biodiversity Strategy and the German Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy. Even though One Health is not explicitly mentioned in the German government's coalition agreement, it contains many indirect references to it.

What does this have to do with you, with science and research? The answer is: a lot. As members of the One Health Platform you are leading by example and already driving inter- and transdisciplinary research. Without research and science, our policymaking is on shaky ground. Science provides the basis for drawing up informed and effective policies. Research institutions and universities play a crucial role in developing innovative solutions and providing data that is essential for policymaking. It is particularly important for disciplines to be interlinked and funding to be targeted accordingly: starting this autumn, the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space is planning to fund seven interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research networks on pandemic prevention and response with a One Health approach. The research networks focus on different subjects including influenza, tick-borne diseases, West Nile virus and antimicrobial resistance. The plan is for these seven networks to collaborate with the One Health Platform. For each network the coordinator will present their work programme at next year's One Health Symposium. International partnerships, such as those promoted by Horizon Europe and other research programmes, are also very important.

Without sound scientific knowledge, we policymakers are groping in the dark. We would be unable to identify new health risks in time, nor would we know how to respond effectively. Only with well-networked research at national and international level, which takes all One Health sectors equally into account, can we find the right answers.

Let us –the researchers and policymakers –continue to work together to reinforce the importance of One Health in our political and scientific discourse and to step up national, European and international cooperation. This will ensure that we can protect the health of people, animals and our environment.

In this spirit, I wish you a stimulating and productive conference!

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