



BORNEO ORANGUTAN SURVIVAL FOUNDATION

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Subject: **CEO MESSAGE – COVID-19 and Orangutans**

Dear Orangutan Friends,

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the new coronavirus, first identified in Wuhan, China in 2019 (COVID-19), a global pandemic. The disease, which was originally transmitted to humans from an unconfirmed exotic animal species in a wet market, now manifests itself as a respiratory infection with symptoms including fever, coughing, shortness of breath, and difficulty of breathing. In extreme cases, the infection can cause pneumonia, acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure, and death. At the other end of the spectrum, in some cases, especially those who are the young and healthy, symptoms can be minimal, making transmission difficult to contain. COVID-19 continues to spread throughout the world, as it is confirmed in all continents except Antarctica.

Here at the Borneo Orangutan Survival (BOS) Foundation, we are based on the islands of Borneo and Java in Indonesia, where we employ over 400 staff, manage 3 natural release sites, carry out two-large scale reforestation projects, run countless community development projects, and operate two orangutan rehabilitation centres. Due to their close relation to humans, transmission of disease from humans to orangutans is a risk that we continually work to minimize through regular health screenings for staff and strict testing requirements for visitors. Currently there are no cases of transmission of COVID-19 from humans to great apes, but the potential for transmission still remains a very real possibility that we must address and manage, especially as we do not know the impact that COVID-19 may have on orangutans. It may affect them less than humans, but it also may be even more deadly, and this is simply a risk we cannot take.

BOS Foundation Actions

As of March 17, 2020, **all BOS Foundation Centres are closing to the public.** This includes our information centre at the Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre in Central Kalimantan and the Samboja Lodge at the Samboja Lestari Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre in East Kalimantan. At both of these locations we will no longer be accepting visitors or volunteers until the disease risk has been eliminated. Additionally, our release and research sites, including our camps in the Bukit Batikap Protection Forest, Bukit Baka Bukit National Park, Kehje Sewen Forest, and the Tuanan Research Area, will no longer be accepting new volunteers or researchers. We will be re-evaluating the situation and extending or ending the project closures on a monthly basis.

We cannot cut off the orangutans from human contact completely however, as they still require daily food and care. Dedicated BOSF staff who continue to work with the orangutans have their temperature checked twice a day and are given leave if they run a fever or feel at all unwell. Staff who continue to work have increased the frequency of their hand washing, mask usage, and glove usage. All disposables are incinerated at the end of each day.

For our offices that do not partake in animal care directly, such as the BOS Foundation HQ in Bogor and the Mawas Conservation Project Office in Palangka Raya, they will be closed starting on March 17, 2020 and all staff will be given the support necessary to work from home. We will be hosting all



meetings digitally or postponing as necessary. Additionally, we will be stopping the travel of our managerial and administrative staff to the animal programs in Borneo to further reduce the risk for disease transmission. Closures of our offices and inter-program travel will be re-evaluated every two weeks.

At this time, we are grateful that there have been no confirmed COVID-19 cases in and around our animal care centres. In the case that there is COVID-19 outbreak in our working areas, we are prepared. We have decided that in the event of a local outbreak, we will only have essential staff working daily. All orangutans suspected of having COVID-19 or exposure to the disease will be immediately quarantined and cared for by our COVID-19 response team, a designated group of veterinarians and animal care technicians that will only be working with the impacted animals for the duration of the outbreak. All tools they use will be destroyed and the centre will receive thorough and regular sterilization until well after the outbreak is resolved.

How You Can Help

With the situation constantly changing, it is vital to keep yourself informed, follow government recommendations, and, most importantly, not to panic. Currently the internet is flooded with memes and jokes about toilet paper shortages and hand sanitizer costing as much as gold, but for animal care centres such as ours, this is having a serious impact. Within an average year, our staff uses approximately 75,000 surgical masks. These are vital for the control of zoonotic diseases, especially for our large populations of orangutans with chronic respiratory disease who rely on us completely for lifetime sanctuary care.

Now we face the perfect storm that includes an increased need for masks and other medical supplies within our centres, increased prices due to panic purchasing, and reduced funding as visitor-based revenue streams stop and the world sits on the brink of recession. Despite this, our dedicated staff continue to persevere because we still have over 400 orangutans that rely on us for food and care, every single day. Even for our staff who will be unable to work, to reduce transmission risk, we are dedicated to ensuring that their pay goes uninterrupted, and that all the local communities and producers we work with go economically unaffected by our temporary restrictions as well.

Here in Indonesia, our BOSF family hopes that yours stays healthy and this unprecedented situation soon comes to an end. If you can, please also keep the orangutans in mind and continue to campaign for the survival of their species. But only from the safety of your home, through the power of the internet.

And from all of us here at the BOS Foundation, thank you to the dedicated healthcare professionals, government bodies, and civil societies around the world who continue to be pillars of support during these trying times.

Warmest regards,




Dr. Ir. Jamartin Sihite, MSc.
CEO BOS Foundation