



October 26, 2021

WHO Headquarters
Avenue Appia 20
1211 Geneva
Switzerland
via email: SAGO@who.int

RE: Public comments on SAGO members

Dear WHO staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO) committee members.

We represent U.S. Right to Know, a nonprofit investigative public health group based in the United States.

According to the WHO terms of reference, SAGO members “must be free of any real, potential, or apparent conflicts of interest,” and “must respect the impartiality...required of WHO.”¹ The following proposed SAGO members do not meet these standards for SAGO membership:

- (1) Dr. Supaporn Wacharapluesadee is a subcontractor on a 2020 multi-million-dollar NIH grant² to EcoHealth Alliance. Her lab at Chulalongkorn University is slated to receive a \$1.07 million subcontract. According to the EcoHealth Alliance, Dr. Wacharapluesadee is a longstanding collaborator for “more than 10 years.”³ Between 2014 and 2019, she was funded by a UC Davis USAID PREDICT 2 grant, in which the EcoHealth Alliance was deeply involved.⁴ Since 2013, Dr. Wacharapluesadee has been a co-author on multiple publications^{5 6 7 8} with the EcoHealth Alliance, including four with its president, Dr. Daszak.^{9 10 11 12}

¹[https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/scientific-advisory-group-on-the-origins-of-novel-pathogens/sago-tor-s-final-20-aug-21_-\(002\).pdf](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/scientific-advisory-group-on-the-origins-of-novel-pathogens/sago-tor-s-final-20-aug-21_-(002).pdf)

² <https://documentcloud.org/documents/21055988-risk-zoonotic-virus-hotspots-grant-notice>

³ <https://documentcloud.org/documents/21055988-risk-zoonotic-virus-hotspots-grant-notice>, pg. 358.

⁴ <https://documentcloud.org/documents/21055988-risk-zoonotic-virus-hotspots-grant-notice>, pg. 78.

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3739538/>

⁶ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34218820/>

⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2050312121989631>

⁸ <https://journals.asm.org/doi/10.1128/MRA.01457-18>

⁹ <https://virologyj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12985-015-0289-1>

¹⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/pmid/33990224/>

¹¹ <https://www.pnas.org/content/118/15/e2002324118.long>

¹² <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-14-684>

Pursuing truth and transparency in public health

USRTK.ORG • 4096 PIEDMONT AVE. #863 • OAKLAND, CA 94611-5221 • (415) 944-7350

The EcoHealth Alliance has conducted research on SARS related-CoVs with the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Anyone with personal, financial or academic ties to the EcoHealth Alliance (including grant funding, co-authorship or other research collaboration) or the Wuhan Institute of Virology, cannot be a SAGO member, because such ties could impair their judgment in an investigation of zoonotic and/or lab origins of SARS-CoV-2. Any such ties constitute an impermissible conflict of interest.

Dr. Wacharapluesadee's association and subcontractor role with the EcoHealth Alliance plainly constitutes a conflict of interest and is disqualifying under the WHO terms of reference.

- (2) Dr. Christian Drosten. Dr. Drosten signed a letter in the Lancet, orchestrated by Dr. Daszak,¹³ arguing that the SARS-CoV-2 lab origin hypothesis is a conspiracy theory.¹⁴ Such prejudgement is disqualifying; it is incompatible with the standard of "impartiality" in the WHO SAGO terms of reference.

Moreover, Dr. Drosten served on a bat conference advisory committee with the Ecohealth Alliance and Dr. Zhengli Shi of the Wuhan Institute of Virology.¹⁵ Dr. Drosten's funding and continued research collaborations rest on the zoonotic potential of bat coronaviruses. For these reasons, Dr. Drosten has a personal stake in SAGO's outcome, because it is to his personal and professional advantage to declare a zoonotic origin for SARS-CoV-2. This, too, disqualifies him from being a SAGO member.

- (3) Dr. Katherin Summermatter. Dr. Summermatter has claimed that a lab leak origin of SARS-CoV-2 is a "typical conspiracy theory."¹⁶ Such prejudgment is disqualifying.
- (4) Dr. Marion Koopmans. At a scientific conference,¹⁷ Dr. Koopmans claimed that a lab origin hypothesis of SARS-CoV-2 has been debunked, along with "meteorites" and "snake origins" of SARS-CoV-2.¹⁸ She has asserted that "we found not a grain of evidence for a lab escape theory" of SARS-CoV-2.¹⁹ Such prejudgment is inconsistent with the impartiality required of SAGO members, and is disqualifying.

Erasmus University's Viroscience department, led by Dr. Koopmans, puts the EcoHealth Alliance as first on its list of collaborators.²⁰ The disclosure also states that the

¹³<https://usrtk.org/biohazards-blog/ecohealth-alliance-orchestrated-key-scientists-statement-on-natural-origin-of-sars-cov-2/>

¹⁴ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30418-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30418-9/fulltext)

¹⁵ https://usrtk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CSU_records.pdf, pg. 1572.

¹⁶https://www-1815-ch.translate.google/news/wallis/aktuell/es-werden-sachen-behauptet-die-weder-hand-noch-fuss-haben-153159/?_x_tr_sl=auto&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en-GB&_x_tr_pto=nui

¹⁷ 21 Feb 2020, [KNAW-symposium](#), Marion Koopmans, 'From spillover to global threat: science in action'.

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J24IfCS7HEs&t=832s>

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=112&v=8KbUPh43304&feature=youtu.be>

²⁰ <https://www.erasmusmc.nl/en/research/departments/viroscience>, see "Collaboration."

viroscience department is “closely involved” in the EcoHealth Alliance. This conflict of interest, too, is disqualifying.

Dr. Koopman’s membership in the conflicted, discredited and failed Global Study of Origins of SARS-CoV-2 is also disqualifying.

The first WHO-convened Global Study of Origins of SARS-CoV-2 failed for several reasons. It was tarnished by conflicts of interest. It failed to seriously investigate the possibility of a lab origin, while advancing the dubious cold chain, frozen food hypothesis. It seemed to act as a public relations instrument of the EcoHealth Alliance and the Chinese government. Participation in this botched WHO panel must be disqualifying for SAGO membership, including for these proposed SAGO members:

- (5) Dr. Vladimir Dedkov
- (6) Dr. Elmoubasher Farag
- (7) Dr. Thea Fischer
- (8) Dr. Hung Nguyen-Viet
- (9) Dr. John Watson
- (10) Dr. Yungui Yang

Of the disciplines listed in the SAGO terms of reference,²¹ only Drs. Blackwell and Summermater come from the disciplines of “biosafety, biosecurity, occupational health and safety, or laboratory safety and security, ethics and social sciences.” This is unbalanced. The proposed SAGO members do not include enough experts from these fields in the terms of reference. Scientists from diverse fields of study, not merely infectious disease, should be included in SAGO for many reasons, including to offset any conflicts of interest from zoonotic origins infectious disease researchers. We urge WHO to add at least three additional members from these disciplines to SAGO.


We urge you to replace the ten above persons with the list below, who would be exemplary SAGO members. Their presence and participation would inspire public trust in the SAGO.

Dr. Filippa Lentzos
Dr. Richard Ebright
Dr. Jesse Bloom
Dr. Alina Chan
Dr. David Relman
Alison Young
Edward Hammond
Milton Leitenberg
Dr. Stuart Newman
Dr. Michael Antoniou

²¹[https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/scientific-advisory-group-on-the-origins-of-novel-pathogens/sago-to-rs-final-20-aug-21_-\(002\).pdf](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/scientific-advisory-group-on-the-origins-of-novel-pathogens/sago-to-rs-final-20-aug-21_-(002).pdf)

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



Shannon Murray, PhD
Staff Scientist



Gary Ruskin
Executive Director