

## DECLARATION ON ANIMAL DIGNITY

On this day, December 10, 2024, we, an international group of scientists, philosophers, lawyers, writers, and political scholars, unite to recognize the dignity of nonhuman animals. Together, we declare that the dignity of animals originates in their agency and autonomy, and in individual and species-specific capacities including but not limited to their rich emotional lives, relational qualities, cultures, sentience, and creativity. We declare that to acknowledge and assert the dignity of animals is to refrain from actions that degrade them to the status of being regarded purely as objects or things. Further, we declare that to respect animal dignity is to promote social, political, and legal structures that support the flourishing of life. We herewith articulate the implications of acknowledging animal dignity for human-nonhuman animal relationships and for their treatment in politics and the law.

### Preamble

### Definitions

- **Agency:** the capacity to act under one's own power, for one's own reasons, in pursuit of one's own interests
- **Animal:** multicellular, eukaryotic organisms in the kingdom Animalia, including humans. This declaration concerns nonhuman animals.
- **Animal Dignity:** framing the human-animal relation by the inherent worth of the animal, which prohibits harms that originate in degrading contexts or actions.
- **Inherent worth:** describes the value of someone or something when they are valuable for their own sake and not just for the sake of other things.

Dignity as a modern concept comes from moral philosophy, ethics, bioethics and medical ethics, and law and rights policy. The concept of dignity is enshrined in conventions, bills of rights, and constitutions throughout many regions of the world. The concept is also used extensively across institutions where the potential for unequal relations between subjects exists. By the commonest definition, dignity is the unconditional and universal moral status of a biologically distinct being who is vulnerable to the harmful agency of others or to unjust structures. Violating

dignity is to disregard the inherent worth of that being and thereby to act against the fundamental needs defined by their unique qualities.

Dignity is often regarded as exclusively relevant to the human species, but a growing number of jurisdictions have extended the definition of dignity to include nonhuman animals.[1] The concept of dignity is invoked in the UN Charter for Nature from 1982, which recognizes that: "Every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to man, and, to accord other organisms such recognition, man must be guided by a moral code of action."

The project of respecting the biologically distinct qualities of individuals, species, and groups is definitionally non-hierarchical and can be applied across many forms, contexts, and types of interaction. In this declaration we focus on the moral, legal, and political implications of respecting animal dignity specifically.

Here, we declare that formally to recognize the dignity of nonhuman animals calls on all humans and human institutions to acknowledge the power dynamics of the relationship between humans and other animals and to address the attendant harms that derive from relationships based in instrumentalization, commodification, or degrading treatment. Violations of dignity perpetuate stereotypes of exploitation, which both increase the likelihood of harms and decrease the ability to recognize another being's interests and capacities. Major forms of dignity-violating treatment include the acts and language that convey a message that diminishes the care or respect owed to that being, for example, a factory farm where an animal is termed only as a unit of profit, thereby justifying the logic of restrictive cages and, in turn, practices like live shackling.

Dignity violations also include the severe limiting of an animal's control over their own life, especially in, but not limited to, contexts of exploitation, and the exclusion of animals from decision-making or from any representation in decision-making. Further, recent scientific and technological innovations such as gene-editing techniques like CRISPR-Cas9 amplify the human ability to instrumentalize animals beyond what was previously possible, and thus increase the potential for exploiting and harming animals. Recognizing dignity bars degrading treatment and offers the grounds on which this treatment should cease. Dignity violations are not diminished or annulled by whether the subject knows they are being degraded.

By recognizing the dignity of other animals, we target:

- a) the way humans and human institutions relate to other animals both conceptually and physically,
- b) the degrading conditions in which many animals are forced to live their lives, and,
- c) the moral status and legal classification of animals.

Acknowledging these facets of the concept of dignity, the undersigned declare the following and seek to adhere by these guidelines in our relations with other animals.

## **Chapter 1. General implications**

### **Respecting species distinctiveness:**

Article 1: All animals deserve dignified lives and treatment, by virtue of the distinctive qualities of their species, cultures, social dynamics, and their individual differences.

Article 2: Due attention to the agentic or expressive qualities of both species and individuals within species should shape relations between humans and nonhuman animals.

### **Supporting flourishing through respecting status:**

Article 3: No animal should be debased by actions or language that suggest they have no value in and of themselves. Dignity requires referring and relating to animals as individuals with their own preferences and subjectivities.

Article 4: Respecting the dignity of nonhuman animals demands recognition of animals' autonomy. Animals should not be unduly prevented from the self-realization of their own species-specific persistence and flourishing.

Article 5: Animals should not be prevented from making contributions to their multispecies communities, for example in the form of social learning or transmission of individual learning.

Article 6: Wild animals should be always respected and treated with dignity. When we make decisions on their behalf or interfere in their lives, special care should be taken to avoid violations of agency and autonomy.

### **Countering degrading objectification:**

Article 7: No animal shall be regarded or treated purely as an object or objectified in degrading ways that directly or indirectly justify suffering or oppression.

Article 8: Dignity prohibits reducing animals to mere instruments, thereby denying their inherent worth. Animals should not be subjected to commercial or industrial exploitations that prevent them from expressing their specific capacities and interests, or that structurally alter their ability to be autonomous, such as genetic modifications that disrupt an animal's agentic capacities.

### **Breaking cycles of denigration and harms:**

Article 9: Animals should not be subjected to degrading treatment that violates their species-specific needs, cultural and/or social lives, and individual characteristics.

Article 10: The dignity of animals should be acknowledged in any and all relations between humans and nonhuman animals.

## **Chapter 2. Implications in politics and the law**

Article 11: Animals should never be treated solely as property or commodity: dignity requires their recognition as subjects with relevant interests.

Article 12: Respecting the dignity of animals entails treating them as intrinsically relevant to law, the direct beneficiaries of legal obligations.

Article 13: Animals can have representation in court when their legal protections are violated or may be in jeopardy.

Article 14: Respecting the dignity of animals means regarding animals as subjects of those laws that aim to protect their interests.

Article 15: The dignity of animals translates into a responsibility of the state, organization, or corporation to ensure adequate legal protection of animals and consequent enforcement of these protections.

Article 16: Respect for the dignity of animals requires the adoption of a legal prohibition of instrumentalization of animals whereby their inherent worth is unrecognized.

Article 17: Respect for the dignity of animals requires safeguarding minimum standards of species-specific flourishing for all animals through the law.

Article 18: Animals should be adequately represented as subjects in the decision-making contexts that may influence their lives.

Article 19: The implications for the dignity of nonhuman animals should be taken into consideration when governments at all levels and international organizations develop and pass law and policy.

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[1] Constitution of Switzerland [*Bunderverfassung*] Art. 120; Swiss Animal Protection Act [55 *Tierschutzgesetz vom 16. Dezember 2005*] Art. 1; Art. 3(a); Luxembourg Animal Protection Act [*Loi du 27 juin 2018 sur la protection des animaux*] Art 1; Spanish Animal Protection Act [*Ley 7/2023, de 28 de marzo, de protección de los derechos y el bienestar de los animales*], Preamble; Brussels (Belgium) Animal Protection Act [*Wet betreffende de bescherming en het welzijn van dieren van 14 augustus 1986*] Art. 1; Proposal for the United Nations Convention on Animal Health and Protection (UNCAHP), Art 3(5).

## **Signed:**

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