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PAWS Outraged Over Conditions Surrounding Death Of Zoo Elephant

(Galt, CA) — The Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) is outraged over the October 18 death of Tatima, a 35-year-old African elephant at the Lincoln Park Zoo.

“This elephant’s death is the direct result of the American Zoo and Aquarium’s stubborn refusal to make decisions in the best interest of individual animal welfare. Tatima lived at the San Diego Zoo’s Wild Animal Park for years before she and her companions, Peaches and Wanki, were shipped out to make room for newly captured elephants. The San Diego Zoo, Lincoln Park Zoo and AZA were not concerned that the drastic change in space and climate would adversely affect the elephants’ health although several elephant scientists opposed the move,” said Pat Derby, founder and director of PAWS.

“PAWS has been challenging AZA’s decision to oppose the proposed relocation of Detroit Zoo’s elephants to the PAWS’ sanctuary in San Andreas, CA. Ron Kagan, the director of the Detroit Zoo, made a compassionate decision based on his concern for the welfare of the two elephants, Winky and Wanda, to send them to a warmer climate. He has been castigated for this decision by the AZA, although the transfer of Tatima to the Lincoln Park Zoo was approved and supported by the AZA. The protests of caring zoo administrators and keepers have been ignored by AZA as they force their insensitive policies on members who are not allowed to disagree,” Derby goes on to say.

In an article recently published by PAWS, Pat Derby criticized the AZA’s policies regarding movement of elephants in the name of conservation as, “the deception perpetrated as part of a carefully conceived public relations campaign to justify the capture of wild elephants from their natural habitat.”

Referring to a statement made by Dr. Michael Hutchins of AZA, that elephants going to sanctuaries were on a “one-way trip,” Derby responded, “The old African elephants — Tatima, Peaches and Wanki who were captured years ago, must wish they had been on

a one-day trip as they shiver in the freezing climate of Chicago. This is hardly humane animal management.”

Although Lincoln Park Zoo and the AZA are once again circling the wagons and stating that the cause of death, tuberculosis in elephants, is not related to the size of the animals’ living area, not climate, the elephant had lived for many years with no symptoms of the disease at the Wild Animal Park in San Diego.

“I am amazed also amazed that two of the top zoos in the country had not diagnosed the disease before she died,” Pat Derby continued. “It is particularly ironic that this tragic and unnecessary death has occurred just as representatives of AZA and the San Antonio Zoo were visiting our facility to determine our suitability for housing the Detroit Zoo elephants. The director of San Antonio Zoo, Steve McCusker, has stated that he is concerned about the lower level of husbandry practiced at sanctuaries. I have the same concerns about zoos. While captivity is not the optimum situation for elephants, zoos have continually refused to recognize the basic needs of captive elephants. They have no respect for individual animals — referring to them as ambassadors for their species. Elephants are highly intelligent, socially complex animals who should never be relegated to the status of representatives for their species.

Note: Within two years of the issuing of this press release, both Peaches and Wanki were dead.