



January 29, 2015

His Excellency Robert Mugabe
President of Zimbabwe
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Samora Machel Ave/3rd Street
Private bag 7700, Causeway, Harare
Zimbabwe

The Honourable Saviour Kasukuwere
Minister of Environment and Natural Resources
11th Floor Kaguvi Building
Cnr 4th Street/Central Avenue
Private Bag 7753, Causeway, Harare
Zimbabwe

The Honourable Walter Mzembi
Minister of Tourism
Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry
Box CY1718, Causeway, Harare
Zimbabwe

Mr Edson Chidziya
Director General of Zimbabwe Parks and
Wildlife Management Authority
P O Box CY140, Causeway, Harare
Zimbabwe

Dear Mr. President, Ministers, and Director:

We respectfully write to you as scientists, conservationists, and animal care, policy and welfare professionals to express our great concern over the capture and imminent export of more than 60 elephant calves, among other wild animals, as reported by the international media. Other reports claim that one calf has already died.

We are shocked to learn of this capture, especially given the massive international response that stopped the export of elephant calves in the past. This included a planned export to North Korea in 2010, and the completion of an export to zoos in China in 2012. In that case, of the four wild-caught elephant calves who were exported from Zimbabwe to China in 2012, only one is alive today. This calf, currently living at the Taiyuan Zoo, is reported to be in extremely poor physical condition and suffering intense mental distress as a result of isolation.

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Exporting these elephants to distant destinations where they will be confined for the rest of their lives is wrong, and will certainly traumatize them and the families from which they have been forcibly removed. This tragic fact is not lost on people around the world who are already protesting Zimbabwe's actions.

We, the undersigned, request that Zimbabwe ban the practice of capturing live elephants and other wildlife for captive use. We further call on you to arrange for the captured elephant calves to be released back into the wild through a carefully managed process of rehabilitation. We ask that these actions be taken for the following reasons:

1. The capture of wild elephants serves no conservation benefit

The IUCN issued the following clear statement in 2003 opposing the capture of wild elephants:

*"Believing there to be no direct benefit for in situ conservation of African Elephants, the African Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission does not endorse the removal of African Elephants from the wild for any captive use."*¹

Furthermore, the argument made by the Zimbabwean authorities that the capture of baby elephants is a way of dealing with the country's perceived problem of overpopulation is scientifically fallacious and, quite frankly, ridiculous.

2. Capture, separation and incarceration of elephants goes against the intentions of CITES requirements

Zimbabwe's elephants are listed on Appendix II of CITES. As such, the Management Authority of the State of export must satisfy two specific provisions of the Convention. Firstly (Article IV, 2c), that any *"living specimen will be so prepared and shipped to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment"* and that international trade in live elephants from Zimbabwe must be to *"appropriate and acceptable destinations, as defined in Resolution Conf. 11.20."*

It is our understanding that the captured elephants are between 2.5 and 5 years of age. Elephant calves suckle until they are at least four years old. Elephant young have evolved to form very strong bonds with their mothers and other family members. Based on our collective expertise, we believe that the captured calves are highly likely to suffer poor health and welfare and to live shortened lives as a result of the trauma of being removed from their families.

Capture and separation from family members is highly stressful to young elephants. Their preparation and holding in small pens and shipment in isolation from family cannot be said to *"minimize risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment"* as required by CITES. Furthermore, there is more than enough scientific evidence that lifelong confinement in zoos is *not* an "appropriate destination" for an elephant.^{2,3} This is evident in the deaths of the three elephants exported by Zimbabwe to Chinese zoos in 2012, and the poor state of the one surviving juvenile currently at the Taiyuan Zoo who is physically and psychologically suffering in the absence of his family. It is also evident from the history of 63 elephant calves exported from Zimbabwe to the U.S. in the early 1980s. These elephants were eventually sent to zoos and circuses. Almost all of them

¹ Statement Issued by the IUCN/SSC AfESG at Mokuti Lodge, Namibia. December 8, 2003. https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pos_captuse_en.pdf.

² Ros Clubb et al., "Compromised Survivorship in Zoo Elephants." *Science* 12: 1649.

³ The Welfare, Housing and Husbandry of Elephants in UK Zoos. University of Bristol. 2008. <http://www.idausa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/U-of-Bristol-Report.pdf>

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died prematurely. One of the few surviving elephants, 32-year-old Nosey, lives a miserable existence: without the company of other elephants, crippled, and forced to perform in a circus.

3. Capture and captivity are detrimental to the individual's welfare

Decades of in-depth scientific research on wild African elephants show that elephants are highly intelligent and have evolved extremely complex social and bonding behaviors. The capture of elephants from the wild, and specifically the removal of individual juvenile elephants from families, has long been recognized as an unacceptable practice because it is traumatic for both the captured individuals and their remaining family members.^{4,5,6}

The disruption of social bonds and the life-long incarceration of elephants in zoos, safari parks and circuses cause enormous suffering to individuals. Internationally recognized scientific papers concerning elephants kept in European and U.S. zoos confirm that elephants fare poorly in captivity. They suffer from a multitude of captivity-related conditions including tuberculosis, herpes, obesity, reproductive disorders, diseases of the feet and joints, as well as psychological stress.^{7,8,9} As a consequence, the average life span of African elephants in zoos is decades shorter than the lifespan of their counterparts in the wild. The same disparity in lifespan is seen in elephants in circuses.

4. Zimbabwe's image

Whether Zimbabwe's CITES Management Authority views such exports as acceptable has little bearing on the views of an increasingly discerning public who care about the welfare of animals, particularly elephants. These views are shared by numerous renowned scientists worldwide.

Having due regard for the welfare of animals is important because we now have scientific evidence demonstrating that they are capable of suffering for many of the same reasons that human beings suffer. Because elephants are so large, so social and so long-lived they are particularly susceptible to abusive treatment.

We urge you not to underestimate the impact on world opinion that your highly disturbing action creates. Already, there are public petitions, campaigns and increased negative publicity for Zimbabwe. In contrast, cancellation of the elephant transfer would promote a more positive image of Zimbabwe in the international media, help to restore Zimbabwe's reputation for being a responsible custodian of its wildlife, and promote wildlife tourism.

⁴ Phyllis C. Lee and Cynthia J. Moss, "Welfare and Well-being of Captive Elephants: Perspectives From Wild Elephant Life Histories," in *An Elephant in the Room: The Science and Well-Being of Elephants in Captivity*, ed. Debra L. Forthman et al. (North Grafton: Tufts Center for Animals and Public Policy, 2009), 22-38.

⁵ Joyce H. Poole, and Cynthia J. Moss, "Elephant Sociality and Complexity," in *Elephants and Ethics: Toward a Morality of Coexistence*, ed. Cristen Wemmer and Catherine A. Christen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 69-98.

⁶ Elephant Voices. N.D. "Elephants Captured and Sold." <http://www.elephantvoices.org/threats-to-elephants/-captured-a-sold.html>.

⁷ Ros Clubb and Georgia Mason, *A Review of the Welfare of Zoo Elephants in Europe*, (Horsham: RSPCA, 2002).

⁸ The Elephant's Foot: Prevention and Care of Foot Conditions in Captive Asian and African Elephants.

"Introduction." Edited by Blair Csuti, Eva L. Sargent, Ursula S. Bechert. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2001, vii.

⁹ The Elephant Charter. 2015. "Principle IV: Management and Welfare of Elephants Held Captive." <http://www.theelephantcharter.info/index.php/principles?id=95>.

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In addition, there is a global movement toward stopping the capture and confinement of elephants: In 2008 South Africa banned the capture of elephant calves for captivity and export to zoos and circuses, and in 2009 India banned the keeping of elephants in zoos. Several zoos in the U.S. are bowing to sound science and public opinion, closing elephant exhibits and sending their occupants to sanctuaries. More than 20 countries have banned the use of elephants and other wild animals in circuses, as have a growing number of cities around the world.

5. Affect on tourism

Should Zimbabwe go forward with the sale of elephant calves, negative public opinion is sure to decrease wildlife tourism. The associated loss in revenues would result in even less funding for wildlife management, which Zimbabwe claims to need. Cancelling the sales would improve prospects for the development of responsible wildlife tourism in Zimbabwe, which has the potential to generate far more income for the country than the sale of animals to foreign zoos or individuals.

It has been estimated that a live elephant has a potential lifetime value to wildlife tourism of more than US\$1.5 million.¹⁰ This includes income generated for travel companies, airlines, and local economies. The long-term loss of tourism dollars resulting from the capture and sale of the more than 60 elephants would be staggering, far outweighing the short-term financial gain generated by their sale at a reported \$40,000 to \$60,000 each.

The entire world is focused on Africa because of rampant elephant poaching and fears that the illegal ivory trade is driving elephant populations toward extinction. It is a black mark on Zimbabwe that rather than doing everything it can to protect its elephants, it is instead selling them off to another country to live short and tortured lives.

It is with great urgency we request that you cancel the transfer of the more than 60 elephant calves and the other captured animals, and that you introduce a ban on the further capture of live elephants. We urge you to do all that you can to preserve and protect the great wildlife heritage of your country.

Sincerely,



Joyce Poole, PhD, Co-director, ElephantVoices

With

Jason Bell, IFAW Regional Director Southern Africa; Director IFAW Elephant Programme

Mark Berman, Associate Director, Earth Island Institute

Chris Pitt and Karen Pettman, Acting Heads of Operations, Care for the Wild International

¹⁰ Dead or Alive – Valuing an Elephant. 2014. <http://iworry.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Dead-or-Alive-Final-LR.pdf>

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