



*"Working within CITES for the protection and conservation of species in international trade"*

The Hon. Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri  
Minister of Environment  
Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate  
11th Floor Kaguvi Building, Cnr 4th Street/Central Avenue  
P Bag 7753 Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe

16 November 2016

### **Potential exports of live elephants from Zimbabwe to captive facilities**

Dear Minister,

The Species Survival Network (SSN), founded in 1992, is an international coalition of over one hundred non-governmental organizations committed to the promotion, enhancement, and strict enforcement of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Through scientific and legal research, education and advocacy, the SSN is working to prevent over-exploitation of animals and plants due to international trade.

You will be aware of the concerns expressed by many organisations and elephant experts in relation to the removal last year of 24 young live elephants from wild populations in Zimbabwe and their eventual export to captive facilities belonging to Chimelong Safari Park in Guangdong Province, China. There is ongoing concern for the current and future wellbeing of these animals.

It has been brought to our attention that as many as 37 additional elephants have been captured from the wild in Zimbabwe, and are currently being held in bomas in anticipation of their export to captive facilities outside of the country. It is our understanding that some or all of these animals may be destined for captive facilities in China. There are anecdotal reports that two of these animals may already have died with the remaining in poor condition and potentially not strong enough to survive the transportation to China.

The ability of captive facilities to adequately provide for the complex biological and social needs of elephants has long been questioned, as has the value of captive elephants to wild elephant conservation and public education. As long ago as 2003, The African Elephant Working Group of

the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Species Survival Commission (IUCN SSC) released the following statement:

*“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.”<sup>1</sup>*

Since that time, a number of statements and letters have been issued by elephant experts and conservation groups calling for an end to the capture of elephants from the wild and their transfer to captive facilities.

Zimbabwe's elephant populations are currently listed on Appendix II of CITES, subject to an annotation<sup>2</sup> limiting trade in live animals to *'appropriate and acceptable destinations'*, as defined in CITES Resolution Conf. 11.20.<sup>3</sup>

We note that the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP17), which took place in Johannesburg in September/October this year, agreed revisions to Resolution Conf. 11.20, including the addition of a requirement that *'the Scientific Authorities of the State of import and the State of export are satisfied that the trade would promote in situ conservation'*.<sup>4</sup> As noted above, the IUCN SSC's African Elephant Specialist Group does not consider there to be any direct benefit to *in situ* conservation from the removal of African elephants from the wild for any captive use, and the transfer of these young elephants will do nothing to address any local issues of overpopulation.

We also note that decisions were agreed at CoP17 instructing the CITES Secretariat to report to the 29<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Animals Committee on the history and implementation of Resolution Conf. 11.20, and instructing the Animals Committee to make recommendations and develop guidance, as appropriate, on the definition of the term *'Appropriate and Acceptable destinations'* and the requirement in CITES Article III that recipients of living specimens of Appendix-I listed species (including most elephant populations) are *'suitably equipped to house and care for them'*.

These important outcomes from CoP17, which come at a time of widespread international concern over the future conservation of elephants, reflect concerns among the international community regarding the trade in live wild-caught elephants subject to Resolution Conf. 11.20 including those from populations in Zimbabwe.

We therefore urge Zimbabwe's authorities to abandon any plans to export these animals to captive facilities overseas and to immediately initiate efforts to return them to their natal herds, or, where

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<sup>1</sup> [https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pos\\_capvuse\\_en.pdf](https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pos_capvuse_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://cites.org/eng/app/appendices.php#6>

<sup>3</sup> <https://cites.org/eng/res/11/11-20.php>

<sup>4</sup> [https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/Com\\_II/E-CoP17-Com-II-30-R1.pdf](https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/17/Com_II/E-CoP17-Com-II-30-R1.pdf)

this is not possible, to identify facilities within Zimbabwe or neighbouring range States where they can be provided with appropriate care.

Zimbabwe has a wonderful diversity of wildlife which should be a source of national pride at a time when Africa's wildlife is under intense pressure. We urge the Zimbabwean authorities to show leadership by abandoning the capture of wild elephants for the purpose of commercial trade, and by doing so to demonstrate Zimbabwe's commitment to securing a future for its wild elephants. The Species Survival Network stands ready to assist Zimbabwe in this respect.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,



Will Travers  
President  
Species Survival Network

This letter has received the endorsement of the following SSN member organisations:

AAP Animal Advocacy and Protection  
Amboseli Trust for Elephants  
Animal Defenders International  
Animal Welfare Institute, USA  
Animals Asia Foundation  
Annamiticus  
Born Free Foundation  
Born Free USA  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Cetacean Society International  
David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation  
EMS Foundation, South Africa  
Environmental Investigation Agency  
Eurogroup for Animals  
Friends of the Elephant, Netherlands (Vrienden van de Olifant)  
Humane Society of Canada  
Humane Society International  
Humane Society International (Australia)  
Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), USA  
Pro Wildlife, Germany  
Save African Elephants (Rettet die Elefanten Afrikas e.V.)  
The Pegasus Foundation  
The Pettus Crowe Foundation  
Tikki Hywood Trust, Zimbabwe  
Wildlife Protection Society of India

cc: Mr. Mucakwa, Director of Conservation, Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Authority  
Mr. Geofferys Matipano, Director General National Parks

Mr. L. Nhidza, Head of Investigations, Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Authority  
Mrs. Doris Tom, Head of Management, Zimbabwe Parks & Wildlife Authority  
Ms. Ida Mupamhanga, Director, Zimbabwe National Parks Board