

**My name is Yvonne Sadovy, Professor of Biology at the University of Hong Kong.**

**For many people the African Elephant is a symbol of power for its size, longevity, stamina, mental faculties, cooperative spirit, and loyalty. South Africa uses elephant tusks in their coat of arms to represent wisdom, strength, moderation and eternity. For Hindus the elephant is a symbol of luck, fortune, and protection for believers. But these revered elephants are now living an increasingly tenuous existence. And Hong Kong has a major role in this sorry state of affairs.**

**It is argued by some who oppose a ban that ivory is culturally important in Hong Kong and mainland China. If this is true, then those who do care about this tradition should be the ones fighting hardest to ensure that elephants last into the future to maintain that culture. But this is not happening. Much of the trade appears to be only about money or luxury status. It is clear that if we do not take serious action, Hong Kong and mainland China will go down in history as having paid a serious role in the disappearance of elephants (there used to be elephants in central and southern China but these are already extinct). If that happens, there would be no elephants for tradition, none for tourism, none for our young people to enjoy in the future. Nobody wins.**

**I therefore strongly support the Hong Kong government's proposed ban on ivory and would like to see it come into place as soon as possible. There is little time to lose. Decisive action has already been taken by most other major ivory trading countries and is particularly important in Hong Kong given this city's role in wildlife trading where laundering and illegal trade in many species of wildlife, including elephants, appears to be rife. I have seen this first hand in my own work on other protected species. We have international commitments to support other countries in stemming the declines in this species and must honour these decisively and effectively. A timeline of 5 years is clearly too long, given current and alarming rates of poaching and illegal trade. Already enormously reduced from natural levels, in 5 years' time a further half of the remaining African elephants will be gone. The ban should start by the end of this year; little is to be gained by waiting 5 more years.**

**I also strongly support the increased penalties proposed for wildlife crime, not just for elephants but for all protected wildlife. There is a real need to recognize and treat wildlife trade under Cap 586 as organized and serious crime. We have among the lowest penalties in the world – these penalties and our ability to investigate crimes and to prosecute illegal trade, should match much more closely the economic value of wildlife and reflect more realistically the misery and cruelty associated with illegal trade whether in catching, transporting or selling the animals or parts of animals, depending on the species.**

**Traders have known for almost 3 decades that it is becoming increasingly risky to trade in ivory – surely the 28 tonnes of ivory burned by the Hong Kong government sent a clear message, as has government's engagement with traders on this issue. There have been many unmistakable signs that the proposed ban was becoming increasingly likely in recent years. Government has long tried to enable the trade to continue legally through permits but simply does not have the capacity, enforcement or investigative capacity, nor the cooperation by some traders, to ensure a legal and sustainable trade. Those traders who have traded illegally are the ones who are damaging the legal traders of ivory, not the conservation groups or the government.**

**Traders who have continued to be active with ivory have been taking a clear and calculated risk and many have probably gained highly by the increasing ivory prices obtained as ivory supplies have declined. Research into government compensation issues globally has shown that there is a very weak justification for financial assistance if affected parties have been able to anticipate**

changes in laws that will affect them. In the case of ivory in Hong Kong such anticipation has been possible for decades. Maintaining risky businesses should not now be rewarded with hard-earned tax-payers' money. Government has discussed retraining for some who would be affected so craftsmen have well considered, which is very important.

For the above reasons, I strongly and deeply oppose compensation. Who will compensate the families of the 1,000 rangers killed during ivory poaching, who will compensate people in the future for not having the chance to see elephants should they become extinct, or those who can no longer get an income from elephant/wildlife tourism?

Times have changed since the ivory trade had its artistic heyday in the past; from all I have learned this trade today seems to be much more about money than culture. Young people today are much more interested in preserving our planet's natural heritage. The world has changed and we must change with it. Saving the elephant is a test of our own cooperative spirit, wisdom, moderation and the core Confucian value of humaneness.