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HKU Conservation Forensics Laboratory's Stance on the Trade of Elephant Ivory in Hong Kong

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The most recent science and most modern forensics tools demonstrate that ongoing poaching of African elephants exceeds their natural growth rate and threatens to cause their extinction. In the past decade, elephant populations in Africa have plummeted. Between 2010 and 2012, more than 100,000 African elephants were killed by poaching (Wittemyer *et al.* 2014), coincident with continental population declines. Among forest elephants, population size declined by 62% between 2002-2011 (Maisels *et al.* 2013). Among savanna elephants, population size declined by 8% per year between 2010-2014 (Chase *et al.* 2016). If such trends continue, savanna elephant populations will decline by 50% every 9 years – representing hundreds of thousands of elephants, and imperiling their long-term survival.

Coincident with these population declines, hundreds of tonnes of elephant ivory have been shipped from Africa to Asia. Genetics tests of 28 ivory shipments exceeding 500 kg intercepted in the past two decades confirmed that this ivory originated from African elephants (Wasser *et al.* 2015). Further, radiocarbon dating of 14 shipments exceeding 500 kg intercepted between 2002 and 2014 shows that most (~90%) of the ivory was derived from elephants killed within 3 years of the seizure (Cerling *et al.* 2016). Thus, the rampant and widespread poaching of African elephants is overwhelmingly illegal.

Hong Kong plays a major role in the trade of elephant ivory between Africa and Asia. Of the shipments examined by Wasser *et al.* (2015) and by Cerling *et al.* (2016), five were seized in Hong Kong. Additionally, the AFCD recently confirmed the illegal sale of ivory originating after 1990 at a shop in Sheung Wan (<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201702/17/P2017021700333.htm>). As such, Hong Kong represents a major trading hub where ivory from recently killed elephants is sold, illegally.

Clearly, the future of elephants in Africa depends largely on government actions in Hong Kong. Consequently, we urge the Hong Kong government to end all commercial trade of elephant ivory, immediately.

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