



Ms Tanya Chan  
Environmental Affairs Panel Chair  
Hong Kong Legislative Council

14<sup>th</sup> March 2017

**Re: WildAid Submission to Hong Kong LegCo Environmental Affairs Panel**  
**Hong Kong Lawmakers: Please Support the Hong Kong Government's Ivory Trade Ban**

Dear Ms Chan,

I am writing to you on a matter of great importance: the Hong Kong Government's proposed legislation to ban the Hong Kong ivory trade and increase maximum penalties for wildlife crime.

According to the latest science available<sup>1</sup>, 33,000 African elephants are unsustainably killed each year, primarily to satisfy the demand for ivory in Hong Kong and mainland China. That's 96 elephants every day, or *one every fifteen minutes*. Some scientists have even suggested that the true number could be even higher.

The elephant poaching crisis in Africa is something that Hong Kong lawmakers can do something about. By choosing not to support elephant ivory trade, Hong Kong lawmakers can take a stand against poachers and the organized crime syndicates who stand behind them. Hong Kong lawmakers as well as members of the public should make the smart choice of not buying products made from elephant ivory as gifts or for personal use. This smart choice supports law and order, anti-corruption efforts and the continued existence of elephant populations for generations to come. It also supports wildlife conservation and the environment in general because elephants are keystone species that support many other kinds of wildlife. Closer to home, choosing to protect elephants can improve relations between Hong Kong, China and Africa which are being strained by unsustainable rates of illegal killing of elephants.

In September 2015, at a high-level meeting at the White House in Washington, D.C., the Presidents of China and the United States, recognizing the urgency of combating global wildlife trafficking, pledged to tighten legislation on ivory import and export, and to take significant and timely steps to halt the domestic ivory trade in their respective markets<sup>2</sup>. In January 2016, our own Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying pledged to ban the Hong Kong ivory trade<sup>3</sup> – but not until 2021, a phase out period that we believe to be far too long. And most recently, the Chinese government has pledged to close down its own domestic ivory market by 31 December 2017, which is less than one year away.

However, these historic moves by the world's largest ivory-consuming nations, as well as Hong Kong, places the ivory trafficking issue front and centre in global political discourse. The time has come for the Hong Kong lawmakers to also take a positive stand, and to not only vote for the Hong Kong government's efforts to ban our own city's ivory trade, but to encourage them to phase it *out as soon as possible*.

Over the past quarter-century, whilst our backs were turned, Hong Kong has become a smuggling haven for illegal wildlife product traffickers, including ivory from African elephants. Multiple media reports have shown how Hong Kong ivory vendors routinely launder ivory from illegally killed elephants into the domestic “legal” market<sup>4</sup>.

Every day that goes by, this “legal” trade masks a heinous parallel illegal trade – as it is impossible to identify a new piece of ivory from an old one. A continued ivory trade in Hong Kong directly contravenes the mainland's commitments to halt its market. International media scrutiny of this illicit trade continues to grow, and until the ivory trade in Hong Kong is completely banned, Hong Kong's reputation on the world stage will be tarnished. For more information on this, please refer to our WildAid report “The Illusion of Control” that details Hong Kong ivory laundering and wildlife crime.

Furthermore, the Hong Kong public has been surveyed and it has been shown to resoundingly oppose Hong Kong's “legal” ivory trade. A University of Hong Kong telephone survey, commissioned by WildAid and released in May 2015<sup>5</sup>, found that 75% of the Hong Kong public supports an ivory sales ban. In fact, according to a July 2015 survey by the Kenya-based NGO Save the Elephants, the people of Hong Kong are not actually buying ivory themselves: Mainland visitors, who smuggle their purchases home, comprise an estimated 90% of Hong Kong's ivory consumers<sup>6</sup>.

1 <http://www.pnas.org/content/111/36/13117.full>

2 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/03/us-fact-sheet-president-obamas-bilateral-meeting-president-xi-jinping>

3 <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2016/eng/p204.html>

4 <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/21/asia/hong-kong-illegal-ivory-trade/>

5 [http://www.wildaid.org/sites/default/files/resources/WildAid%20Ivory%20Consumption%20report\\_POP.pdf](http://www.wildaid.org/sites/default/files/resources/WildAid%20Ivory%20Consumption%20report_POP.pdf)

6 <http://savetheelephants.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2015HongKongIvoryReport.pdf>

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Hong Kong lawmakers can have a positive effect on global biodiversity, while helping to restore the health of tourism-based economies, communities and livelihoods in Africa that have been devastated by poaching, by voting YES to support the government's ivory ban and by calling on the Hong Kong public to **stop buying ivory** as a best practice. *Because when the buying stops, the killing can too!*

Yours sincerely,



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