



International Fund for Animal Welfare
国际爱护动物基金会

Ms. Tanya Chan
Environmental Affairs Panel Chair
Hong Kong Legislative Council

March 24, 2017

Re: IFAW Submission to Hong Kong LegCo Environmental Affairs Panel
In Support of Hong Kong Government's Ivory Trade Ban

Dear Ms. Chan,

I am writing to urge Hong Kong lawmakers to support the Hong Kong Government's proposed legislation to ban the Hong Kong ivory trade and increase maximum penalties for wildlife crime.

Poaching for the ivory trade is driving the slaughter of 20,000 – 30,000 African elephants each year. A recent continent-wide census showed that elephant populations in southern and eastern Africa had declined by nearly 30 percent from 2007 to 2014.

Illegal killing and trade of wildlife fuel, and are fueled by corruption; undermine the rule-of-law; cost the lives of rangers and community members; and are having a destabilizing effect on rural communities, many of whom rely on elephant-based ecotourism.

It is well recognized that ivory trade anywhere threatens elephants everywhere. The vast majority of African elephant range states support banning the ivory trade and there is a clear global momentum to close down all ivory markets. The United States finalized a near-total ivory ban in 2016. The Chinese government is implementing its ban of commercial ivory markets by the end of this year. There is extensive public support for the closure of domestic ivory markets globally, including in Europe.

In January 2016, Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying pledged to ban the Hong Kong ivory trade¹ – but not until 2021, a phase out period that we believe to be far too long.

Over the past quarter-century, 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” market². 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. 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 consumers³.

¹ <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2016/eng/p204.html>

² <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/10/21/asia/hong-kong-illegal-ivory-trade/>

³ <http://savetheelephants.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/2015HongKongIvoryReport.pdf>



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While mainland China banned ivory markets, maintaining the legal ivory markets in the SAR will increase burdens on law enforcement agencies; provides opportunities for criminals to exploit the policy gap; stimulate consumer demand for ivory and enable trafficking of ivory from the SAR to the mainland.

A continued ivory trade in Hong Kong SAR directly contravenes the mainland's commitments to halt ivory markets and compromises President Xi's pledge to combat wildlife crime and achieve ecological civilization. As long as Hong Kong's legal ivory market exists it continues to tarnish the global reputation of Hong Kong as a progressive and enlightened metropolis in step with global environmental concerns.

The time has come for the Hong Kong lawmakers to take an immediate and decisive stand to vote for the Hong Kong government's efforts to ban the city's ivory trade as soon as possible.

Sincerely

Grace Ge Gabriel
Asia Regional Director
International Fund for Animal Welfare