

June 2, 2017

Panel on Environmental Affairs
Legislative Council
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
People's Republic of China

Re: Legislative proposal to phase out the local ivory trade

Dear Honourable Members of the Panel,

I am writing to you to express my steadfast support for the legislative proposal to phase out the local ivory trade in Hong Kong without monetary compensation. I believe that Hong Kong has a duty to protect and conserve global biodiversity, and the Government's proposal will move our city in the right direction.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an inter-governmental agreement aimed at ensuring that the survival of species is not threatened by trade, to which the People's Republic of China is a party, and has banned the international trade of ivory since 1989. Unfortunately, the poaching of elephants for their tusks has continued, endangering the survival of wild populations. The elephant poaching crisis has grown over the last decade, and monitoring data from CITES has revealed that around 60% of African elephant deaths in every year since 2010 have been the direct result of poaching.

Sales of ivory obtained prior to 1989 continues to be permitted in Hong Kong, one of the largest remaining ivory markets in the world, provided that they have been registered with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. Regulatory shortcomings with regards to the ivory trade in Hong Kong are well-documented, and have enabled the laundering of illegal ivory through our city's ivory outlets. Ivory traders in Hong Kong have been able to replenish depleted stocks with illegal ivory obtained through poaching, and scientific analyses to determine whether ivory products are legal and pre-date the 1989 ban are expensive and resource-intensive. In addition to domestic trading, Hong Kong has also been identified as a major transit conduit for large quantities of ivory destined for the Mainland.

The fact that some of our city's legal ivory traders have provided a platform for the sale of products produced through the unlawful killing of elephants is an appalling attack on our rule of law, a core value held by the people of Hong Kong. Further delaying the closure of this antiquated trade is intolerable. Legally compliant ivory traders have enjoyed ample time to sell their remaining stockpiles since 1989, and will continue to have the more-than-generous opportunity to do so until the end of 2021 as per the Government's planned grace period.

Given that licensed traders will have had over three decades to sell their remaining legal stocks by the time the ban comes into full effect, it is my position that the domestic traders' demands for compensation should be summarily dismissed. Any compensation scheme would be an open invitation to black market traders to transfer their illegal ivory to a registered outlet for a taxpayer-funded payday. CITES has named Hong Kong as an area of "primary concern" with regards to the ivory trade, a label that should in no way be associated with one of the most developed and advanced societies in Asia; providing compensation to an industry that has hurt Hong Kong's standing in the world would be an injustice to our community.

Banning the ivory trade in Hong Kong is long overdue, and failure to do so would only contribute to the continued poaching and endangerment of elephants in the wild. I respectfully call on you, our legislative representatives, to support the Government's proposal on the matter.

Sincerely,

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