



United States Department of State

*Bureau of Oceans and International
Environmental and Scientific Affairs*

Washington, D.C. 20520

June 2, 2017

The Honorable Tanya Chan
Chairman of the Panel on Environmental Affairs
Legislative Council
of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
of the People's Republic of China

Dear Ms. Chan:

The United States would like to express our strong support for the proposal now being debated by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong to phase out the local trade in ivory by amending the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance. We encourage the Legislative Council to adopt the amendment in its current form.

Elephant populations face a crisis, as dozens are slaughtered each day to supply the ivory trade. This trade is a major element of global wildlife trafficking, which fuels corruption, threatens the rule of law, spreads disease, and destabilizes communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihoods. The rapid decline in elephant populations and the criminality that this trade sustains make it all the more pressing for governments around the world to implement ivory bans as soon as possible.

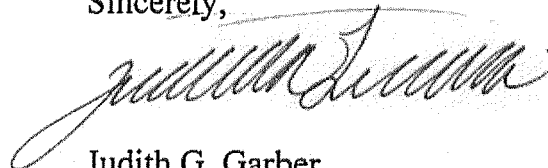
In 2015, then President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping made an historic commitment to halt our countries' respective commercial trade of ivory. The United States implemented its near-complete ban on import, export and domestic commercial trade of ivory in July 2016, and China enacted bans on ivory import in 2016 and plans to close all of its ivory markets and processing centers by the end of 2017. The global community has also spoken. At the 17th Conference of Parties for the Convention on Illegal Trafficking in Endangered Species (or CITES) in 2016, a resolution was adopted calling on all CITES parties to take concrete steps as a matter of urgency to close domestic ivory markets that contribute to poaching and illegal trade.

While these are very positive developments, we must keep up the momentum, as the remaining ivory markets around the world continue to support wildlife trafficking. We must also be diligent in preventing mainland Chinese demand from simply moving to other markets, such as Hong Kong. If Hong Kong ivory markets remain open, the region could become a center for criminal syndicates seeking to benefit from ivory's still-legal status.

I would particularly like to note that the United States has serious concerns about any legislation that would compensate ivory traders for their ivory stockpiles such as has been proposed to the Legislative Council. Such measures create a perverse incentive for ivory traders to stockpile ivory during the phase-out period, potentially exacerbating poaching in Africa at a critical time. Neither the U.S. nor Chinese ivory bans have provisions for this kind of compensation. We believe that the timeline currently envisioned under the proposed legislation should be sufficient for the industry to adapt to changing circumstances.

The United States thanks the Legislative Council for its consideration of an ivory ban. We hope that Hong Kong stands with the global consensus to combat wildlife trafficking and stop the decimation of elephant populations. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith G. Garber', written in a cursive style.

Judith G. Garber
Acting Assistant Secretary