



UK DECISION COULD MEAN LIFE OR DEATH FOR THOUSANDS OF AFRICAN ELEPHANTS

Breaking news: DOHA Qatar

Will the lives of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of Africa's beleaguered elephants be put at risk because of the United Kingdom's lack of leadership? It could all be down to the decision that the representatives of the United Kingdom make in the next few days.

The situation is clear:

Two proposals before the CITES conference here in Doha seek to **downlist** elephants to allow **for trade in ivory**.

The one from Tanzania would result in trade of over 89 tonnes of ivory and the one from Zambia in trade of almost 22 tonnes.

The findings of a Panel of Experts that recently visited both countries highlight numerous deficiencies in law enforcement and elephant protection as well as high levels of poaching and illegal trade. In light of this information, many Parties at the CITES meeting are strongly considering rejecting both Tanzania's and Zambia's proposals. The CITES Secretariat itself has now come out calling for rejection of the Tanzanian proposal.

And while the EU also appears to be moving in the right direction on Tanzania's proposal, on the equally dangerous Zambia proposal (Prop 5) the EU is split. A small number of countries remain in favour, a significant number are now opposed but the UK, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic remain undecided.

"What is going on?" asks Will Travers, CEO of the Born Free Foundation, a member of the Species Survival Network. "Most African countries with elephants are against the two proposals, most of the EU members appear to share that view, many other countries from Israel to India and Parties from South America are like-minded, **but the UK clings to a mantra of sustainable use in the face of overwhelming evidence that supporting either of these proposals could have a further catastrophic impact on some of Africa's most vulnerable elephants.**"

Born Free has repeatedly called on the UK Environment Secretary, Hilary Benn, to take a lead on this issue yet it seems we are now even more out of touch with reality.

"I blame the poor quality assessment of the civil servants leading the UK on this issue for our weak and illogical position," continues Travers. "These are the same people who previously supported the 2008 sale of over 100 tonnes of ivory to China and Japan in the erroneous belief that it would satisfy demand and reduce poaching. How wrong they were then – how wrong they are now."

In 2009 poaching hit countries like Kenya, Tchad, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Tanzania hard. Over 20 tonnes of illegal ivory has been intercepted and the price of raw illegal ivory has soared to over £1,000 a kilo.

Zambia is also stricken with problems. The country's elephant population which stood at an estimated 160,000 in 1981 is now at 27,000 or lower. Poaching increased by 150% between 2002 and 2007 and remains a severe problem. Zambia's anti-poaching and elephant monitoring activities are inadequate and law enforcement activities are compromised due to cuts in Customs staff, down by 50% over recent years.

"Like so many citizens I am amazed and confused at the way the UK is handling this life or death situation." concludes Travers. "If – and heaven forbid this is the case – either of these two proposals actually ends up being approved because of the UK, millions of people will have every right to believe that we have been betrayed. The blood of Africa's elephants will be on their hands."

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Notes to Editors:

About Born Free

The Born Free Foundation is a dynamic international wildlife charity, devoted to compassionate conservation and animal welfare. Born Free takes action worldwide to protect threatened species and stop individual animal suffering. Born Free believes wildlife belongs in the wild and works to phase out zoos. We rescue animals from lives of misery in tiny cages and give them lifetime care.

Born Free protects lions, elephants, tigers, gorillas, wolves, polar bears, dolphins, marine turtles and many more species in their natural habitat, working with local communities to help people and wildlife live together without conflict. Our high-profile campaigns change public attitudes, persuade decision-makers and get results. Every year, Born Free helps hundreds of thousands of animals worldwide. For more information about Born Free please visit: www.bornfree.org.uk