

Wen Jiabao Guojia Zongli
Premier
Guowuyuan
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People's Republic of China

6th May 2011



Dear Premier Wen,

I am writing on behalf of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) to congratulate you on the commitments you made at the International Tiger Forum in St Petersburg in November 2010 to save the wild tiger. However, I must also raise concerns regarding an issue that is undermining China's laudable national effort: the lack of commitment from some Departments within the Chinese Government.

EIA is an international non-government campaigning organisation, committed to investigating and exposing environmental crime. The findings of our investigations are used to inform enforcement officers and decision-makers about priority actions to combat the organised criminal networks plundering our planet for profit.

I would like to draw your attention to recent comments made by a senior member of the State Forestry Administration at a meeting in New Delhi on 29 March 2011. This meeting was attended by delegates from eleven tiger range states. During that meeting, the representative stated that China has historically received reports from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on the availability of illegal tiger products in China. The delegate then stated that, since the SFA has **not recently** received reports from these NGOs it has been assumed there are **no issues regarding the illegal tiger trade in China**.

This statement hints at a serious degree of complacency by the SFA in the face of the tiger extinction crisis. It raises serious questions about the SFA's willingness and capacity to proactively investigate the illegal tiger trade across China.

As you may be aware, many NGOs are poorly resourced and cannot mount regular investigations. In 2010, for example, EIA had no resources to conduct an investigation into the illegal tiger trade in China. This is the sole reason why no 2010 report was released (although we reported previous findings from 2004 through to 2009).

More importantly however, it is simply not the role of NGOs to be the primary source of information to Government Agencies on the nature of the illegal tiger trade. They do not have the mandate, nor are they empowered to do so.

Historically, in the absence of evidence that the Government is seriously investigating the illegal tiger trade – as opposed to making isolated seizures – international NGOs have felt compelled to mount their own investigations.

As well as being a tiger range state itself, China remains the key consumer of illegal tiger parts and derivatives. Intelligence on the nature of this trade, and the criminal networks involved, is critical if other tiger range countries are to stand a chance of stopping the onslaught resulting from the increasing demand in China. Such intelligence can be gained only from professional, targeted investigations.

The illegal trade in tiger skin and bone in China is not an emerging issue. It is one that has been highly publicised for over two decades. Despite this, the level of investment in professionalizing the State Forestry Administration has not been sufficient to equip it with the skills and resources to combat this truly transnational organised crime.

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It is perhaps time to hand over responsibility for investigating tiger and other wildlife trade to a dedicated fulltime unit of police investigators, with adequate experience and training in covert operations to be able to infiltrate the powerful criminal networks controlling the trade.

This may be further warranted when the following example of a conflict of interest is taken into account. EIA remains concerned that despite international commitments, China has paved the way to re-open domestic trade in tiger and leopard skins through Notification 206 issued by the Chinese State Forestry Administration on the 29 September 2007. This relates to the registration of skins (see attached), and it has been again mentioned in China's national 'to-do' list, drawn up as part of the Global Tiger Recovery Programme (GTRP).

Point II of this Notification implies that skins of tiger and leopard from 'legal origins', including skins from captive bred tigers, can be registered, labeled and sold, effectively re-opening trade in tiger at a time ***when the rest of the world is trying to end it.***

EIA believes that any market for tiger products from captive tigers endangers the wild tiger and works against the policy you yourself articulated at St. Petersburg, that *"every country should vigorously combat the trade in tiger parts"*.

The policies of the SFA also appear to undermine China's commitments under CITES Decision 14.69 which states that tigers should not be bred for trade in their parts and derivatives.

In light of these issues, EIA respectfully urges your office to work directly with the SFA to improve their response and engagement on enforcing wildlife crime and to ensure that they fully support the objective of ending **all trade in all parts from all tigers, whether wild or captive.**

We especially urge you to consider establishing a dedicated police investigation unit with the authority to operate nationally to combat tiger and other wildlife crime. Further, that in keeping with your commitment made in St Petersburg, the unit should have the authority to liaise with INTERPOL and other intergovernmental organisations under the International Consortium for Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC).

Yours sincerely,



Debbie Banks
Head of Tiger Campaign
Environmental Investigation Agency

CC H.E. Liu Xiaoming, Ambassador of the PRC to the United Kingdom

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Ambassador of the People's Republic of China
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6th May 2011

Your Excellency,

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter addressed to Premier Wen Jiabao regarding tiger conservation and illegal trade, with relevant supporting materials.

The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), has dispatched a copy directly to Premier Wen, but I would be most grateful if you could also ensure that the matter is conveyed to the appropriate individual in his office.

In light of Premier Wen's strong commitment to tiger conservation, articulated at the International Tiger Forum in St Petersburg, Russia, November 2010, I am sure he would wish to address the matters herein.

With kind regards,

Debbie Banks
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