

Permanent Secretary Prince Mupazviriho
Ministry of Environment Water and Climate
11th Floor Kaguvi Building
Cnr 4th Street/Central Avenue
P Bag 7753 Causeway
Harare
Zimbabwe

Re: Capture of 170 elephant calves from Hwange National Park to China

Dear Permanent Secretary Prince Mupazviriho,

As a supporter of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, a wildlife conservation charity based in Kenya, I am writing to not only express my grave disappointment over the shipment of 24 wild elephants to a life of confinement and confusion in China, but to share my serious concerns regarding the planned export of an additional 170 elephant calves from Zimbabwe to China.

Following the death of Cecil the Lion, all eyes remain on Zimbabwe and the manner in which it protects its magnificent species. It is in the best interest of Zimbabwe to make strong and ethical decisions regarding its wildlife in order to prove to the world that it *is* capable of protecting its endangered species. Zimbabwe offers tourists the rare experience of watching elephants roam freely in their natural habitat, safe with their families. While some 100 elephants are slaughtered each day in Africa at the hands of poachers, Hwange's elephants face a dire threat to their existence. It has been well-documented that parts of Zimbabwe have lost 75% of its elephants over the past 14 years to poaching. Although there has been a reported 10% rise in elephant populations within Hwange National Park in recent years, this only brings the total to 54,000 - a significantly low figure which in no way justifies the trade of young elephant herd members from the wild to safari parks in Asia.

It is not only Zimbabwe's duty to protect elephants from poachers, but to conserve their wilderness and habitats, ensuring them a safe future in the wild. Should Zimbabwe fail to conserve its wildlife, tourism will inevitably decrease; as travellers choose to visit more sustainably managed wildlife parks and avoid controversial areas. Although it has been claimed that the live trade in infant elephants will contribute to the 'conservation' of the park, a detailed study performed by the DSWT's *iworry* campaign found that an elephant generates more than \$1.6 million USD through tourism during its lifetime. Elephants are worth 76 times more alive than dead, so is this trade even financially viable? Conservation and associated wildlife tourism can provide long term financial gains for Zimbabwe, the trade of 170 baby elephants, will offer only a one time financial incentive, which will soon be spent.

Regarding the elephant trade, in which you quoted, "*... Now, if I am giving them to someone to look after them, not in a zoo, but keeping them alive, is one not being very much a conservationist by making sure that you are keeping these animals alive?*" Conservation is not merely about 'keeping an elephant alive' it is the continued preservation of a species in their own habitat, for the benefit of many other means of wildlife, which owe their survival to the existence of elephants in a natural habitat. Removing an elephant from the wild has irreversible effects on the environment, wild spaces and ultimately the ecosystem, which humans rely so heavily on.

In addition, the quality of life for elephants in captivity, away from their herd, and without careful attention for their emotional state is extremely poor. Elephants are fragile animals and several of the 24 were reported dead after capture and relocation. As explored in numerous elephant behavioural studies and supported by Dr Dame Daphne Sheldrick DBE, who has hand-reared in excess of 190 orphaned

elephants in Kenya, elephants have the ability to feel strong emotions: love, loss, sadness, and depression. Recent images of the 24 elephants in captivity reveal the physical and mental toll this trade in wildlife has had on these individual elephants. It is with great sadness that I ask you to consider the grief that the elephants feel after being torn from their families, to whom they are deeply bonded, to the depression of being held in captivity, unable to roam naturally.

Family is all-important to elephants - if they lose their family, they are susceptible to death and irregular maturation. The DSWT has spent decades perfecting the hand rearing of orphaned elephants to return them to the wild, yet the Trust still loses calves because of the complexity of an elephants' psychological and physical state when separated from its herd. Elephants are not built to withstand this trauma and the ramifications of being removed from their natural environment.

You have it within your power to save these animals. Regardless of the holding capacity of Hwange National Park, these elephants deserve a voice, human understanding and respect. Elephants are priceless and Zimbabwe should work to protect the species within its borders, where they belong and where they are free.

You are in a position to help elephants and secure their future - please take the lead in protecting this iconic species and their habitat.

Yours sincerely,

[FULL NAME]

[ADDRESS]