

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
c/o Embassy of Canada to the People's Republic of China
19 Dongzhimenwai Dajie
Chao Yang District
Beijing 100600 PRC

January 30, 2012

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

We are writing on behalf of the Asia for Animals 2011 organizing committee members, representing international organizations with extensive knowledge of animal welfare. On the eve of your visit to the People's Republic of China, we would like to bring to your attention the strong negative reaction from Chinese society and our supporters from around the world to the Canadian seal trade plan targeting mainland China. The controversial nature of the seal trade is no secret. Canada should stop promoting seal meat, seal fur and all other seal products to the Chinese people. We urge you to exclude seal product trade as a topic in your discussions with Chinese leaders.

Canada's aggressive promotion of seal trade has triggered a nationwide campaign in China. Activists in 15 provinces have joined the campaign. A legislative proposal was submitted to the National People's Congress to ban the import of seal meat and all other seal products. In March 2011, China's official International Chamber of Commerce issued a briefing to 27 government offices including the Commerce Ministry and the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine urging the authorities not to open the market to seal meat. The campaign has attracted much media attention. A special online report on Canada's seal hunt generated more than 26,000 comments condemning the brutality within the first week of its publication.

Seal product trade to China is an insignificant part of the Canada-PRC bilateral trade of \$55.9 bn (2010); yet, it could unite the Chinese public behind a nation-wide boycott of other Canadian products. The remarks disparaging Chinese culinary culture made by members of the Canadian sealing industry in their effort to push for expanded seal trade have angered the Chinese. Attempts to turn China into a dumping ground for Canada's globally criticized seal products are sure to damage Canada's reputation. Another issue is that the production and processing of seal meat are not currently under regulation of any food safety standards. Studies have shown that cadmium, mercury and lead are all found in seal meat and blubber. Seals can also carry a number of infectious diseases such as brucellosis, trichinosis and botulism that can be spread to humans. Treated like fish pursuant to Canada's Fish Inspection Act and the Fish Inspection Regulations, seal meat does not receive a rigorous testing and screening process. Chinese consumers deserve products made with strict compliance to safety standards. Their concern over the safety of seal meat is obviously justified.

Finally, the cruelty inherent to seal products runs counter to the new moral development in China. China has been taking actions to improve its animal welfare situation. It has also been working to protect its own remaining spotted seals. Recently, Chinese authorities, in response to public petitions, ended controversial programs for introducing foreign sports such as rodeos and bullfighting to China. Seal products do not belong in the ethical domain of a rapidly changing Chinese society.

On behalf of our tens of millions of supporters, we appeal to you to exclude seal product trade from your talks with Chinese leaders. The Canadian government should focus its efforts instead on helping sealers move toward alternative livelihoods, thereby eliminating a notorious item from Canada's list of exports. China is no market for products rejected by the international community. Chinese animal protection advocates will vigorously oppose this effort. Canada should respect public opinion in China and choose to stand on the right side of history.

Sent on behalf of the following organisations:

- Animal Guardians
- Animal People
- Animals Asia Foundation
- Animal Concerns Research & Education Society
- Humane Society International
- International Animal Rescue
- International Fund for Animal Welfare
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (UK)
- Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Hong Kong
- World Society for the Protection of Animals

