



Christie's Auction Houses

12 September 2011

### **Sale of rhinoceros horn artefacts**

Humane Society International is deeply concerned about the continuing sale of rhino horn artefacts at Christie's auction houses around the world.

As you may know, a major rhino poaching crisis has hit Africa and Asia in recent months, a result of escalating prices in the east Asian rhino "medicine" markets. Hundreds of rhinos have been slaughtered and the poaching shows no sign of abating. African and Asian governments are struggling to protect their rhinos in the face of well-armed gangs carrying the latest hi-tech tracking equipment.

You may also be aware that rhino exhibits in European museums have recently been targeted by criminal gangs: Europol has linked a spate of rhino horn thefts - twenty-eight of them since 2009 - to organised crime, money-laundering and drug-trafficking. This is a totally new development and one that shows how lucrative the illegal rhino horn trade has become. Its value in east Asia has now surpassed that of gold, platinum and all Class A drugs but one. On a recent research trip to Vietnam, we were offered rhino horn at prices ranging from US\$36,000 - US\$83,000 per kilogram. In the early 1990s, it was sold at an average price of US\$10,000 per kilogram. This rise is mainly attributable to a newly-created myth that rhino horn cures cancer.

We have also received information from a trade source in east Asia to the effect that new rhino horns and artefacts are being stained (with tea, among other substances) in order to make them appear antique.

Last year, the European Union enacted new regulations on the re-export of rhino horn, in an attempt to clamp down on the abuse of exemptions for "antique" rhino horn sold at auction. It had been clear for some time that prices had risen sharply and that buyers from east Asia were more concerned about the weight of the horns than about any artistic qualities they may have.

The new regulations still permit the re-export of rhino horn carvings whose artistic value exceeds that of rhino horn "medicine", but since the artistic value is determined by the highest bidder, this is clearly a loophole that is highly likely to be exploited, particularly as rhino horn prices in east Asia continue to rise.

We note that a total of 14 rhino horn items will be offered for sale at two auctions at your Rockefeller Plaza premises on September 15th and 16th. One of the items, which has an estimated price of \$40-60,000, appears to be little more than a raw rhino horn on a metal mount. It is likely that \$70-80,000 could be achieved on the Chinese or Vietnamese medicine market, assuming the weight of horn in the item to be around 1kg. A carved cup, valued at \$20-40,000 could achieve a similar price.

Any rhino horn that is released onto the traditional medicine market will stimulate demand, and will

help to perpetuate the cancer myth. The beleaguered rhino populations of Africa and Asia cannot withstand any further surges in poaching.

We therefore request that you remove these rhino horn items from your catalogue, and that all Christie's auction houses do the same.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MJ Jones', enclosed within a large, loopy oval shape.

**Mark Jones BVSc MSc MSc MRCVS, Veterinary Surgeon**  
**Executive Director**  
**Humane Society International/UK**  
**5 Underwood Street**  
**London**  
**N1 7LY**  
**United Kingdom**  
**Tel: +44(0)207 4905288**  
[mjones@hsi.org](mailto:mjones@hsi.org)

**For and on behalf of Humane Society International**