

August 12, 2016

Dear Ministers of Environment of the European Union Member States,

As clergy members, faith leaders, and faith-based organisations representing a diverse range of religious traditions, we urge you to support actions that would afford the African elephant the highest level of international protection possible. Specifically, we request that you support a package of five proposals¹, backed by the 29 range state-strong [African Elephant Coalition](#), at the forthcoming Conference of Parties of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES CoP17) in South Africa in late September.

The duty to care for creation is present in religious teachings and sacred texts that span centuries and, in some cases, millennia. As a result, we consider ourselves the guardians of the wondrous diversity of nature that is a key part of God's plan for creation. Elephants are sentient beings with complex social lives and high intelligence. They are an iconic and beloved species synonymous with Africa's natural heritage. Elephants are the keystone species to their ecosystems and the keystone to the ecotourism economy, bringing hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world and generating billions of euros in revenues.

Unfortunately close to 100 of elephants in Africa are killed every day for their tusks. Experts have warned that if the current poaching rate continues, the African elephant could be gone from the wild in our lifetime. In Central Africa, forest elephant populations have declined by 65% during the last five years, with scientists predicting their possible extinction in 10 years. The prospect that we could be the generation to lose the wild African elephant would be a stain on our humanity. There is also the inherent cruelty in elephant slaughters as poachers sometimes harvest the tusks while the animal is still alive. Simply put, these majestic animals should not be reduced to churn out ivory trinkets and other dispensable luxury goods.

The elephant poaching crisis is devastating to humans as well. During the last decade, at least 1,000 wildlife rangers were killed while on duty. Involvement of transnational criminal syndicates and African militia groups in wildlife crime has undercut the local economic livelihoods and challenges the rule of law. Some of these groups are notorious in committing crimes against humanity such as Janjaweed and Lord's Resistance Army. The poor and the vulnerable will be impacted the most by the continued destruction of these animals.

We, therefore, are both shocked and disappointed to learn of the European Commission's opposition² to the African elephant protection proposals as outlined in the 1st July Commission position paper. There shouldn't be any political nuance in saving elephants from the destructive ivory trade and giving them the highest level of international protection possible. When there is so much at stake, our answer to the elephant poaching crisis should be unambiguous – that we choose elephants over the continued trade in ivory.

¹ The five proposals are Proposals 16, Document 57.2, Document 57.3, Document 57.4 and Document 84.2 which can be found on <https://cites.org/cop17>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/09/the-eu-is-right-to-oppose-a-global-ivory-ban>

As people of faith, we respectfully urge the European Union to show solidarity with, and to respect the will of, the majority of African elephant range States in their efforts to seeking the highest level of international protection possible.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. David A. Pickering, Moderator, The National Synod of Scotland, United Reformed Church

Rt. Revd. John Pritchard, Bishop of Oxford and the Church of England

Professor Joy Carter DL, Vice Chancellor of Winchester University (Anglican foundation)

Professor David Clough, Professor of Theological Ethics, University of Chester

Sanjay Jagatia, Director/Secretary General, Hindu Council UK

Bhumi Project

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, the Senior Rabbi of Masorti Judaism UK

Lara Smallman, Director, EU Jewish Vegetarian Society

Animal Interfaith Alliance on behalf of themselves and their affiliate organizations:

The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals

Bhagvatinandji Education and Health Trust

Catholic Concern for Animals

The Christian Vegetarian Association UK

The Christian Vegetarian Association US

Dharma Voices for Animals

The Institute of Jainology

Islamic Concern

The Jewish Vegetarian Society

The Mahavir Trust

The Oshwal Association of the UK

Quaker Concern for Animals

The Sadhu Vaswani Centre

Veerayatan: Compassion in Action

The Young Jains

Lara Smallman, Director, EU Jewish Vegetarian Society

Christine Gutleben, Senior Director of Faith Outreach, The Humane Society of the United States

Contact: Iris Ho, Wildlife Program Manager, Humane Society International.

Email: iho@hsi.org Tel: +1.301.258.1407