



Mexico City, February 4th, 2016.

## **His Holiness Pope Francis**

Humane Society International (HSI) is a leading global animal welfare organization that works to protect all animals—including animals in laboratories, farm animals, companion animals, and wildlife. HSI supports programs in many countries and recently opened an office in Mexico City to build greater awareness, improve animal welfare and help enact strong legislation and policy to protect Mexico's animals.

Mexicans—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—are very excited about your upcoming visit to our country. Outreach to the religious and the faithful is an important part of our work. Within HSI, we fully embrace the ideas you championed in your encyclical about animals and the environment—*Laudato Si'*—in which you call on all of us to embrace a more humane path towards animals.

The encyclical reminds us, "that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people. Every act of cruelty towards any creature is 'contrary to human dignity'."

Your visit to Mexico opens a window of opportunity and much hope for those of us who work to confront animal cruelty here. As you are probably aware, every year a number of cruel spectacles take place in various parts of Mexico, in which different kinds of animals are brutally injured and killed, often in the framework of Catholic celebrations.

One of these events is "*Embalse de toros*", which takes place in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, around February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the day of the Virgin of Candelaria. In this "fiesta", Cebu bulls are forced to drink alcohol; they are chased, beaten and stabbed by a mob; and they are dragged into the Papaloapan River, where many of them drown.

We hope that you would agree that there is no excuse, cultural or religious, for this cruel and inhumane practice to continue. Animals are sentient and conscious beings, and are therefore capable of suffering and feeling pain and anguish. They are God's creatures, and intoxicating, hurting and drowning bulls is wrong. The *Embalse de Toros* and other cruel events that kill or injure



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animals are the kind of events that hurt our society, are an offense to God and damage Mexico's image in the world.

We are deeply grateful that you have announced that you will pray with Mexicans to confront corruption, organized crime and human trafficking. It will be highly valued and consequential, if you could include compassion for animals as a central theme of your visit's message.

As someone who loves this country, I truly believe that your visit to Mexico will infuse hope and compassion in a society that desperately needs it.

Sincerely,

**Daniel Antón Aguilar García**

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