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Dear Mr. Zheng and Mm. Hu:

With the Chinese New Year drawing near, we would like to take this opportunity to wish you a very happy holiday and a fruitful new year. Under your leadership, China Association of Zoological Gardens (CAZG) has made great contributions to the improvement of zoo management and animal care among its member organizations. Your personal efforts have enabled successful collaborations between CAZG and our organizations in the past three years. As we look forward to continuing our close partnership in future, we thank you for both your vision and leadership in the endeavour to make Chinese zoos modern institutions of humane animal display and conservation education. Humane Society International (HSI) and Animals Asia Foundation (AAF) value the partnership with CAZG. We shall continue to work with you in ways most conducive to the attainment of our common objectives.

We are writing today to bring to your attention our concerns over the recent import to China of four African elephants for two of CAZG's member zoos, namely Taiyuan Zoo and Xinjiang Tianshan Safari Park (see the attached media report). Understanding that CAZG is not in a position to veto member zoos' import decisions, we hope that you could forward this media report and our concerns and suggestions to the two relevant institutions.

The importation of the four elephants is of particular concern to the international conservation and animal protection community for two primary reasons. First, wild caught elephants do not adapt successfully to captivity. Captive environments cannot replicate conditions experienced by elephants in the wild; they do not support natural behaviours and this can lead to very stressful living situations for the elephants. Elephants subjected to stressful conditions typically develop unnatural behaviours, chronic illnesses such as tuberculosis, and can become aggressive. These effects are well studied and extensively documented.<sup>1,2,3</sup> The transfer of wild-caught African elephants to institutions where winters are severe raises further questions. As we understand, both Taiyuan and Xinjiang are situated in North and Northwest China where winters can be harsh. Elephants must be protected from extreme cold, which is typically done by housing them indoors, resulting in additional limitations to their environment, and added stress. Second, the combined weight of the four elephants is reportedly less than 4 tons, or roughly a ton each, suggesting that these are very young calves that were likely taken forcefully from their mothers in the wild. Elephants are among the most social of animals: the young nurse for at least the first two years but this can continue for six years; young males leave their mother's herd at age 10 or so, but young females stay in the herd their entire lives. Separation of calves from their mothers and their adult relatives causes physical and psychological harm to their well-being. The death of one of these four calves at the Taiyuan Zoo lends support to our concerns that the calves are suffering from premature separation from their mothers, long-

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<sup>1</sup> Live hard, die young, how elephants suffer in zoos. RSPCA 2006

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/ImageLocator/LocateAsset?asset=document&assetId=1232714741738&mode=prd>

<sup>2</sup> Clubb et al. 2009. Fecundity and population viability in female zoo elephants: problems and possible solutions. *Animal Welfare*, 18:237-247

<sup>3</sup> Clubb & Mason. 2008. A review of the welfare of zoo elephants in Europe. RSPCA. 303 pages.

distance transport, being placed within an unnatural environment inappropriate for African elephants, especially young calves, and a potential lack of appropriate husbandry and veterinary practices.

HSI and AAF would like to make the following recommendations for the care of the young elephants:

1. It is important that CAZG lead an inspection team composed of elephant experts and wildlife veterinarians to Taiyuan and Xinjiang to make sure that the two institutions have the expertise, facilities and enrichment programs in place for the care of the elephant calves. We will join the team if necessary.
2. Taiyuan Zoo and Tianshan Safari Park have an ethical obligation to give the elephant calves undivided attention to ensure that they will survive the most difficult time of their young lives. Tender care must be provided to the calves to help them cope with what they have experienced and are experiencing in their drastically different environment. Companionship of other elephants in ways acceptable to the calves or of humans for at least 18 hours a day should be guaranteed.
3. Both Xinjiang and Taiyuan are currently experiencing one of the worst winters on record. It is of utmost importance to ensure that the elephant calves are housed indoors with **minimum** temperature of 21 degrees Celsius. When their physical condition improves, they can be moved into other indoor facilities that have a temperature range from a minimum of 13 degrees Celsius to a maximum of 21 degrees Celsius. Proper ventilation, lighting, and bedding or soft substrate should also be provided.
4. Indoor space allowance must be guaranteed so that the elephants can move about. Abnormal behavioural patterns such as pacing in a circle or figure-8 should be documented and efforts to minimize these put in place as this pattern can be physically damaging to muscular-skeletal development. The indoor enclosures should primarily consist of soft substrates, with minimal hard substrate areas. No elephant restraint devices should be used unless out of absolute necessity, e.g., for veterinary purposes. Zoo keepers and veterinarians must approach the elephant calves especially carefully and with high sensitivity to the latter's current psychological conditions. Clean drinking water must be available to the calves 24 hours a day and varieties of food suitable to African elephants must be provided in the appropriate combination and quantity. A daily observation of the elephants' physical and psychological state and a daily record-keeping of their behaviours are strongly recommended. We have attached management guidelines of the American Zoo Association and the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums and we would be grateful if you would pass these on to the relevant zoos. We would also like to offer to have these guidelines translated into Chinese if necessary.
5. Young elephants must be provided with the opportunity to play. Large piles of substrate such as dirt, wood shavings, or sand are excellent to encourage exploration and play. Young elephants have an extraordinary amount of energy that would be used as they follow their family groups across the plains, and when not travelling, they would be playing with other youngsters. When they don't have the opportunity to expend this energy, they can become frustrated and depressed, which can lead to behavioural problems such as aggression, and physical problems such as loss of appetite and illness.
6. Efforts must be taken to gradually introduce the calves to the institutions' other elephants, if there are any. Should the young elephants fail to fit in the environment in any or both of the institutions, the option to return the elephants to Africa should never be excluded. Should this turn out to be

the choice, HSI and AAF shall provide assistance in collaboration with other specialized conservation organizations.

HSI and AAF work with colleagues who have expertise in managing captive elephants, providing for their welfare, and training them for veterinary cooperation. Should Taiyuan Zoo and Tianshan Safari Park have any questions regarding the care of the elephant calves, or be interested in advice or suggestions to improve the welfare of these calves, please send us their requests. We look forward to hearing from you and from the two institutions directly on the conditions and the latest of the three elephant calves.

Finally, we are deeply concerned by reports that 14 more elephants are to be imported to China for zoos (see attached media report). We understand that import permits are issued by the State Forestry Bureau. However, it is important that CAZG advise its member zoos to be cautious in making import decisions. Import of elephants, for example, from countries with a history of elephant abuse should be avoided. Elephants tamed by brutal means for display and circus performance purposes have life-long behaviour problems. Import decisions are therefore the first line of defence against stereotypic behaviours among captive elephants and other animals. Zoos should also be cautious about the import of other African species such as rhinos, giraffes, and lions due to similar animal welfare and conservation problems.

Thank you for considering our concerns and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Teresa Telecky, Ph.D.

Director, Wildlife Department, Humane Society International

Dave Neale, Animal Welfare Director, Animals Asia Foundation UK Office