



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**
AFRICA

January 11, 2018

**His Excellency Emmerson Mnangagwa
President of Zimbabwe**

cc:

The Right Honourable Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri
Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate

The Right Honourable Priscah Mupfumira
Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality

High Commission of Zimbabwe in Pretoria
Embassy of Zimbabwe in the United States of America
United States Embassy in Zimbabwe

Dear President Mnangagwa

Firstly, congratulations on your presidency. We wish 2018 to be a prosperous and productive year for Zimbabwe and its people and wildlife.

We are writing this letter on behalf of concerned wildlife advocates globally urging you to immediately halt the further capture and export of young, wild elephants from Zimbabwe's parks to captive facilities overseas. News reports indicate that 30 young elephants, between the ages of 3 and 6, were flown to China at the end of December last year. The calves had open wounds and appeared ill and lethargic at the time of shipment on Ethiopian Airlines, further indicating poor husbandry and handling.

Humane Society International is the global affiliate of The Humane Society of the United States, the largest animal protection organization in the United States, with tens of millions of supporters worldwide.

At the time of submitting this letter co-signed by 33 animal conservationists and conservation groups, several petitions have been initiated urging your government to halt these activities. Most notably, a [Care2Petition](#) has almost 259,000 signatures. Further, a petition against the single export of five elephant calves from Namibia to Dubai in 2017 garnered support from over 180,000 citizens globally and a separate letter, co-signed by 35 animal and conservation groups, was submitted to the Namibian government urging the export to be halted. Zimbabwe is receiving global attention for all the wrong reasons.

Elephants are extremely intelligent, sentient animals, with a highly organized social structure including strong family bonds that can last a lifetime. Young elephants, such as the ones reportedly exported in the shipment last month and the several prior transfers from Zimbabwe to China, are dependent on their mothers and their herds to acquire necessary social and behaviour skills. Bull calves only leave their natal herds at 12 to 15 years old and females remain for life. Disruption of this bond is physically and psychologically traumatic for both the calves and remaining herds and leaves lifelong scars.

In a recent [expose](#) revealing damning undercover footage, our concerns that the elephants may be subjected to harsh and cruel treatment to force them to submit to human dominance, was confirmed during capture. According to a [paper](#) presented at the sixty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Geneva (Switzerland), 27 November -1 December 2017, “captured calves transported to holding facilities suffer depression, lethargy, anxiety, increased stress, intra-specific aggression, and a diminished or non-existent appetite, sometimes resulting in death or contributing to premature mortality. Training in temporary facilities may include food and/or light deprivation, restriction of movement, forcing the animal into an uncomfortable position for extended periods of time, and regular beatings”.

Based on the body of overwhelming and uncontested scientific evidence, South Africa took the commendable decision in 2008 to ban the capture of elephants from the wild for purposes of captivity and trade under the terms of the *National Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in South Africa (2008)*. It is an example that your new government can consider. The International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Species Survival Commission African Elephant Specialist Group opposes the removal of African elephants from the wild for any captive use because there is no direct benefit for *in situ* conservation. Selling and sending young, wild elephants to lifelong captivity and possible elephant rides in facilities in China is in no way an *in situ* (natural habitat) conservation programme.

Zimbabwe’s elephant population has plummeted six percent since 2001 according to the survey by the [Great Elephant Census](#). Poaching remains a concern, especially with the excessive numbers of elephants poisoned over the last few years.

Removal of elephants from the wild is not an effective or humane population control measure. In South Africa, HSI has been administering immunocontraception programmes for 18 years, which has proven an effective tool for population control with more than 800 elephant cows treated in 25 reserves across the country. If overpopulation in certain areas of Zimbabwe is of concern, we would be happy to share the details of our immunocontraception programme with you.

President Mnangagwa, following the events of the last few weeks, we plead with you to stop these atrocities and lead by example such as by the Zimbabwean female ranger anti-

poaching units, [Akashinga](#), that have won accolades worldwide. We were especially heartened that your youngest daughter trained with the programme. It is a great opportunity for your new government to win further global support by halting the exports of wild elephants to captive facilities and use eco-tourism to promote Zimbabwe's wildlife and natural heritage on an international platform.

We sincerely request you to heed our plea – to keep African elephants in the wild, on African soil, and not subject them to lifelong captivity for entertainment in facilities in China or elsewhere.

Sincerely yours,



Audrey Delsink
HSI-Africa Executive Director



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Wildlife Programme Manager, HSI

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