



**HUMANE SOCIETY  
INTERNATIONAL**



11 June 2009

To: Mr. Chen Zhu, Minister of Public Health

Dear Mr. Chen,

The undersigned organizations jointly call on you and the Ministry of Public Health to intervene and stop the indiscriminate killing of innocent dogs in Hanzhong City, Shaanxi Province. It is our hope that the Ministry of Public Health can propose to the State Council and other relevant ministries that the mass slaughter of dogs is an ineffective, cruel and outdated method of rabies control, and that it should be ended across the country.

Following a number of reported rabies cases, the authorities in Hanzhong City, Shaanxi Province, China, have recently instigated a policy of indiscriminate dog slaughter. Ordinary citizens are being encouraged to participate in the killing; a banner even went up outside a government building urging citizens to "mobilise everyone to kill dogs". As a result, groups of people have been stalking the streets with poles and sticks, brutally beating to death any dog they come across.

The slaughter is not only targeting street dogs. Dog owners were reportedly told to destroy their dogs within 48 hours or submit them to be exterminated by the military police at a cost of 100 yuan (around US\$15). Killing squads were apparently assigned districts and told they could not return home until every dog in their district had been killed. To date the numbers of dogs slaughtered is estimated to run into tens of thousands. Many of the dogs being killed are reported to be registered and vaccinated household pets.

Indiscriminate slaughter is an ineffective way of controlling rabies. Many cities around the world where rabies is a problem have adopted trap-neuter-release and vaccination programmes to control their dog populations, and to control rabies. Data from Chennai in India shows that a comprehensive trap-neuter-release and vaccination programme was far more effective in reducing rabies than indiscriminate slaughter; through the adoption of trap-neuter-release and vaccination of dogs, that city has seen a reduction in human cases of rabies from around 120 per year to 5 per year since 1996.

International health organisations recognise mass vaccination of dogs as the most effective method of controlling canine, and by extension human, rabies. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends mass vaccination of dogs as "the most effective method of controlling canine rabies". It states that "there is no evidence that removal of dogs alone has ever had a significant impact on dog population densities or the spread of rabies". The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) states

that "Animal vaccination remains the method of choice to control and eradicate rabies". The Alliance for Rabies Control also states that the most effective method to successfully eliminate rabies is the use of organised mass vaccination campaigns.

According to the WHO, at least 70% of the canine population needs to be vaccinated to effectively control rabies. China has not yet conducted a canine rabies vaccination programme on that scale; according to a figure quoted at the National Rabies Control and Prevention Strategy Symposium in 2007, only some 10% of dogs in China are vaccinated against rabies. The implementation of mass vaccination programmes would do away with the need for mass culling.

Mass canine vaccination programmes also make long term economic sense. The cost of vaccinating dogs is many times less than the cost of treating people who have been bitten. According to the OIE, "Currently with only 10% of the financial resources used worldwide to treat people after a dog bite Veterinary Services would be able to eradicate rabies in animals and thus stop almost all human cases".

A stable, desexed and vaccinated dog population can help prevent rabies by keeping "foreign" dogs away. Clearing city streets of dogs only encourages other animals from the surrounding areas to take their place, potentially spreading disease.

There is also evidence that the Chinese people are overwhelmingly against the policy. A recent online opinion pole suggested that more than 70% of respondents in China opposed the slaughter.

Other Chinese cities, such as Beijing, and more recently Hehei, have stopped indiscriminate slaughter and are looking at more enlightened and humane methods of dog population and rabies control. The dog cull in Hanzhong runs counter to the progress made in other cities in the region in the field of urban animal management. If the dog killing continues, the image and reputation of Hanzhong in particular, and China as a whole, will suffer in the eyes of the world. This misguided indiscriminate slaughter of innocent lives must end.

As international animal protection groups that have always welcomed and supported China's progress, we appeal to the Chinese authorities to end the dog massacre once and for all. Our supporters worldwide are expressing grave concern about the unnecessary suffering in Hanzhong. While we encourage our supporters do continue monitoring the situation, we want to be forward thinking and take positive steps. To this end, we are ready to offer appropriate expertise and practical resources to help localities with the problem of dog overpopulation and disease control. We would also be prepared to set up a task force with the aim of sharing information on internationally accepted methods of humane dog population management, dog registration, and mass vaccination.

Over the past 30 years China has made huge progress. International animal protection groups are willing to be part of China's future progress in disease control and urban animal management. It is our hope that the Ministry of Public Health can take the lead and collaborate with relevant ministries to initiate mass canine vaccination and sterilization of pet dogs, stray dogs and stray cats in designated cities, with a view to introducing the practice across the country in the near future. For the time being, we hope the Ministry of Public Health can propose to the State Council to bring an immediate end to the mass slaughter of dogs, an ineffective and cruel way to control rabies. We look forward to the days when humans and animals in China can live in harmony with each other.

Sincerely,

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#### **Further information:**

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