Mr. Karmenu Vella  
Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200  
1049 Brussels  
Belgium

1 December 2017

Re: Closure of domestic ivory markets

Dear Mr. Vella,

On behalf of the members of the African Elephant Coalition (AEC), we the undersigned, thank you for your response dated 29/06/2017. We appreciate that the European Commission is considering whether to take additional steps to restrict the EU’s ivory market and is currently consulting widely on this issue. We also welcome that the UK government has meanwhile suggested to close its domestic market (with some limited exemptions), and the stricter measures already taken by France. However, we are concerned, that on the EU level, very limited progress has been made to close the EU ivory market.

We understand that ivory (whether raw or worked) continues to be traded legally within the EU
in auction houses, markets, shops and online – and that antique items can even be traded without permits or certificates. It also seems that the EU has been emerging as the major exporter of legal ivory over the past decade – and that despite the recent EU suspension of raw ivory exports, worked ivory can still legally be exported from the EU. Seizures of worked and raw ivory within the EU and at its borders as well as seizures in other countries, of shipments originating in EU Member States demonstrate that illegal trade is taking place in and from the EU – and that it serves as a transit route. In addition, we are concerned that the existence of legal ivory markets and exports provide opportunities for laundering illegal ivory. The markets and exports also fuel demand for ivory within the EU and abroad and thus contribute to poaching.

We would therefore like to take the opportunity once again, to encourage the Commission and EU Member States to take the strongest possible action to end trade of ivory in, from and to the EU.

At the ongoing meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, members of the AEC have highlighted that, more than one year has passed since the CITES Parties agreed by consensus that, legal domestic ivory markets contributing to poaching or illegal trade should be closed as a matter of urgency. This breakthrough agreement has meanwhile been endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly. While we are encouraged by the anticipated closure of China’s ivory market by the end of 2017, we are more than disturbed that on a global scale, very limited progress has been made so far in implementing the CITES recommendation to close domestic ivory markets.

Recent reports presented to CITES document that, illegal ivory trade has continued to increase and is persisting in various countries and regions of the world. Moreover, it has been observed that markets, trade routes and ivory products in trade are shifting – probably in response to enforcement action and policy decisions. One result of such trade shifts is that, Lao PDR has now been identified as the fastest growing ivory market in the world.

These developments reconfirm that, ivory trafficking continues to be a global problem, which requires a truly global response. Closing down markets in just a few countries or banning trade in some ivory items but not others will fall short of solving the current poaching crisis.

We as members of the AEC greatly appreciate the European Union’s efforts in significantly contributing to the African Elephant Fund, providing the much-needed support in fighting wildlife crime and stressing the importance of the need for compliance with provisions of CITES and
other international agreements. However, we remain concerned that, such efforts may be undermined and ineffective, unless key players such as the EU take the lead in ending exports, imports and closing domestic markets for ivory, which have long been recognized as a major threat to the future of elephants.

The EU has a critical role to play in the closure of domestic markets and ending the poaching crisis. We would therefore like to request you to propose, as a matter of urgency, a comprehensive, unlimited ban of ivory trade to, from and within the EU, and that any exemptions are kept to the minimum in accordance with the Precautionary Principle.

We would appreciate it if this letter finds favour with you and could also be treated as a strategic response to the Commission’s public consultation on ivory trade in the EU, launched on 15 September 2017. We would also kindly request you to forward it to the EU Member States.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick OMONDI
Co-Chair of the African Elephant Coalition, Kenya

Ali Laouel ABAGANA, Delegate from Niger
Member of the CITES Standing Committee