



Commissioner for the Environment, Karmenu Vella
European Commission
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels

December 7, 2017

Dear Commissioner Vella,

As clergy members, faith leaders, and faith-based organisations representing a diverse range of religious traditions, we urge you to promulgate a strict ban on the import, export and inter-EU trade of elephant ivory. We are submitting this letter in response to the public consultation on ivory trade in the EU.

The duty to care for creation is present in religious teachings and sacred texts that span centuries and, in some cases, millennia. As a result, we consider ourselves the guardians of the wondrous diversity of nature that is a key part of God's plan for creation. Elephants are sentient beings with complex social lives and high intelligence. They are an iconic and beloved species synonymous with Africa's natural wonders and heritage. Elephants are the keystone species to their ecosystems and the keystone to the ecotourism economy, bringing hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world and generating billions of euros in revenues.

As people of faith, we hold dear respect and compassion for all beings including wild animals and the communities who live beside them. We are especially concerned about the poaching cruelty against elephants and ivory trafficking challenging the rule of law and the local communities' social and economic stabilities. Hundreds of thousands of elephants were killed during the last decade. More than a thousand wildlife rangers lost their lives while on duty. Poaching and wildlife trafficking have affected many faith members in the rural communities from Africa to Southeast Asia.

Wildlife trafficking is not solely an Africa or an Asia problem. Every place where ivory is traded plays a part in fuelling ivory consumption and facilitating ivory trafficking. We were disheartened to learn that the EU is among the world's largest ivory exporters and that the majority of the ivory re-exports from the EU were sent to Hong Kong and China, known as the global hub of the illegal ivory trade.

While some people may say that the re-exports from the EU were old and legal items, conservation experts and enforcement officials have lamented that legal ivory markets provide a convenient cover for illicit ivory because of the difficulty to distinguish the two. Any legal ivory trade will perpetuate the market demand for ivory and fuels poaching. Moreover, every piece of ivory comes from a dead elephant, regardless the animal died five years ago or eighty years ago. We do not support a trade built on slaughters of one of the most sentient beings on earth.

The EU's actions come at a critical juncture as China and Hong Kong are amidst of closing their ivory markets. We must not lag behind in the international effort to end the ivory trade. As people of faith, we respectfully urge that the EU stop our complicity in contributing to the illegal ivory trade, once and for all, with a strict ban on the import, export and inter-EU trades of ivory.

Sincerely,

Catholic Concerns for Animals

Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa on behalf of eight national chapters

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), and on behalf of 34 of ARC's African, Asian and European faith partners who in 2013 signed statements calling on their vast communities to stop the illegal wildlife trade.

Animal Interfaith Alliance (AIA) on behalf of themselves and their affiliate organizations:

The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals

Bhagvatinandji Education and Health Trust

The Christian Vegetarian Association UK

The Christian Vegetarian Association US

Dharma Voices for Animals

The Institute of Jainology

Islamic Concern

The Jewish Vegetarian Society

The Mahavir Trust

The Oshwal Association of the UK

Quaker Concern for Animals

The Sadhu Vaswani Centre

Veeravatan: Compassion in Action

The Young Jains