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Green Party
for the South East of England

The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DEFRA
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
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February 26th 2008

Dear Minister,

I understand that DEFRA will be representing the UK at this summer's 57th CITES Standing Committee meeting, at which it is anticipated a decision will be taken on China's bid to become an approved buyer for one off sales of ivory.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge you to vote against China being granted this status unless all the conditions laid out in CITES resolution Conf 10.10 (Rev 14) have been strictly adhered to.

The CITES Secretariat has already indicated that China will meet these conditions and that adequate domestic trade controls are in place, yet this is not the view of international NGOs. For example, there is substantial evidence that highlights deficiencies in China's enforcement capacity, a key requisite to ensuring that the one off sale of stockpiles from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe is not exploited by illegal traders.

China remains one of the primary destinations for illegal ivory - the majority of illegal ivory seized is destined for this country. So, I am concerned that granting China one off buyer approved status may stimulate demand for ivory, both legal and illegal, posing a risk to vulnerable elephant populations.

Furthermore, as I am sure you are aware, there are some problems with the CITES MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants) programme, designed to act as a warning system for any surge in poaching following the one off sales. Given that it only monitors elephants living in protected areas - a mere 16% of Africa's elephant population - MIKE is unable to adequately signal increased levels of poaching overall. Without proper means of tracking the impact of the one-off ivory sales on elephant populations, it is additionally important that trading status is not granted to China when such a move might trigger considerable global demand.

China's economic power is burgeoning and the UK has an important role to play in ensuring that this does not occur at the expense of human rights and environmental standards. In the absence of sufficient domestic trade controls or CITES led follow up monitoring of poaching levels, I would urge you to vote against China's bid to be granted trading partner status for the one off ivory sales.

I look forward to hearing your position on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.