







NGO response to proposals from Namibia and Zimbabwe to Cull Elephants and other Wildlife

23 October 2024 – The undersigned organisations are deeply concerned by the announcements by some governments in southern Africa to cull large numbers of elephants and other wild animals, including in National Parks.

In late August 2024, **Namibia** declared it would kill 723 wild animals, including 83 elephants¹, and later increased this number to 100². Shortly afterwards, **Zimbabwe** announced its intention to kill at least 200 elephants.³

The justifications given for these threats include a combination of providing meat to drought-stricken citizens, reducing pressure on land and water resources, mitigating human-elephant conflict, and reducing alleged wildlife over-population.

However, while we acknowledge the severity of one of the worst droughts in decades in southern Africa, the killing of large numbers of wild animals cannot be justified for the following reasons:

(1) Culling fragile wildlife populations to feed people is not sustainable and cannot provide food security to millions of people requiring food assistance during a prolonged drought. The distribution of game meat also generates a demand that cannot be met sustainably in the long term, thereby potentially fueling poaching and illegal trade.

(2) Culling does not resolve human-wildlife conflict. Rather, it further threatens fragile wildlife populations, fractures the social structure and stability of wildlife populations (e.g. of elephants^{4 5}), traumatizes surviving animals, and can lead to aggression towards humans thereby increasing future conflict.

(3) The slaughter of elephants results in the stockpiling of tusks, increasing the pressures to undermine international bans on ivory trade and open up ivory markets. We are concerned that Namibia and Zimbabwe have been at the forefront of efforts to reverse the international ban on ivory trade in order to generate income. This would inevitably fuel demand and increase poaching pressure with devastating consequences for remaining elephants across their entire range.

(4) Killing wild animals that are the basis for the tourism economy would threaten sustainable livelihoods. In Zimbabwe, tourism is the third largest economic sector⁶ and contributed US\$ 433 million to the country's GDP⁷. This industry is heavily reliant on healthy wildlife populations and intact protected areas and could suffer significantly from the culling of wild animals.

(5) The move to cull elephants is a major policy reversal. It was carried out in Zimbabwe and South Africa between the mid-1960s and the mid-1990s but was abandoned after heavy criticism because of the cruelty and trauma inflicted on these highly intelligent and social animals.

(6) African savanna elephants are categorized as Endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Their populations have declined by at least 60% across the continent over the last 50 years.⁸ While southern Africa has been less affected by these declines and is home to the largest populations of savannah elephants, claims of recent population growth and over-population have no scientific basis. Recent studies show that the populations in southern Africa have remained largely unchanged since 2014.^{9 10}

We are concerned that the proposed culls may ultimately serve the interests of those who stand to benefit from the commercial exploitation of threatened wildlife populations.

A number of experts and organisations based in southern Africa have publicly expressed concerns regarding the proposals, including the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) in Zimbabwe¹¹, the Zambia-based organisation African Rivers¹², and the South Africa-based Pro Elephant Network¹³.

The current drought affecting parts of southern Africa is devastating for both people and wildlife. Nevertheless, the governments of the countries concerned are not devoid of resources to implement effective measures to address the problem and should use the drought as an opportunity to employ stronger land governance and prioritise sustainable agricultural production among smallholder farmers in rural areas.

We note that experts have suggested a number of rational and sustainable alternatives to address the effects of the drought, most importantly the provision of staple food such as grain to ensure food security.^{14 15} Also, a wide range of measures and policies are available that have been proven to be effective in preventing and solving human-wildlife conflict without resorting to the indiscriminate killing of wild animals.^{16 17} These measures should be explored and implemented before any lethal interventions are considered.

We call on the governments of the countries concerned to withdraw plans to cull elephants and other wildlife, and instead to use their available resources to implement existing, well-proven alternative, sustainable and humane measures to tackle the current challenges facing both people and wildlife.

We also call on donor governments and agencies to link the provision of aid to the implementation of effective and sustainable measures to ensure food security and human-wildlife coexistence, while also protecting increasingly threatened wildlife populations.

Signatories

Action for Elephants
African Climate Alliance
Africa Conservancy Foundation
AllRise Attorneys for Climate and Environmental Justice
Amboseli Trust for Elephants
Ancient Earth Farm
Animal Alliance of Canada
Animal Asia
Animal Defenders International
Animal Defense Partnership
Animal Talk Africa
Animal Welfare Institute
Bambelela Wildlife Care NPC
Ban Animal Trading
Beauty Without Cruelty
Betty's Bay Baboon Action Group
Bob Jacobs, Colorado College
Born Free Foundation
Born Free USA
CATCA Environmental and Wildlife Society
Centre for Animal Rehabilitation and Education
Center for Biological Diversity
Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG)
COMARINO, Conservacion de Mamíferos Marinos de México
Community Led Animal Welfare
Communications Climate Justice Charter Movement
Conservation Justice
Co-Operative and Policy Alternative Centre
David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation
DolphinCareAfrica / DolphinEncountours.Org
Dzomo La Mupo
EAGLE, Eco Activists for Governance & Law Enforcement
East Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness
Ecoflix
Elephant Reintegration Trust
ElephantVoices
EMS Foundation
Fondation Franz Weber
Free Bunka
Future for Elephants
Future for Wildlife
Gifted for Good
Global White Lion Protection Trust
Good Governance Africa
Green Group Simonstown
Ian Redmond OBE, Wildlife Biologist
International Elephant Project
Institute for Critical Animal Studies
Kogelberg Villages Environmental Trustees
LAGA, Wildlife Law Enforcement

Law of the Wild
Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization
Mizu Ecocare
Monkey Helpline
Moses Litoroh, Elephant Conservationist, Kenya
Mutare SPCA
Ocean Not Oil
OSCAP
Panthera Africa Big Cat Sanctuary
Peace4Animals
Pro Wildlife
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Rhinos in Africa
Robin des Bois
Ross Harvey, Director of Harvey Economics Pty Ltd, South Africa
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Save African Rhino Foundation
Save the Asian Elephants
Sharon Pincott, Elephant Behavioural Specialist, Author of "Elephant Dawn", Hwange, Zimbabwe
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Southern African Fight for Rhinos
TerraMar Research
The Corbett Foundation
Vervet Monkey Foundation
Voices for Asian Elephants
Voice4Lions
Wild Africa Fund Southern Africa
Wild Law Institute
World Animal News
Zimbabwe Elephant Foundation
Zoocheck

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/namibia-cull-83-elephants-distribute-meat-people-affected-by-drought-2024-08-27/>

² <https://nbcnews.com/node/107389>

³ <https://allafrica.com/stories/202409230027.html>

⁴ <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1186/1742-9994-10-62.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/12/4/495>

⁶ <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/zimbabwe-travel-and-tourism>

⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/publications/travel-tourism-development-index-2024/interactive-data-and-economy-profiles-afaa00a59c/>

⁸ <https://iucn.org/news/species/202103/african-elephant-species-now-endangered-and-critically-endangered-iucn-red-list>

⁹ <https://www.kavangozambezi.org/2023/08/31/kaza-launches-its-2022-kaza-elephant-survey-results/>

¹⁰ <https://elephantswithoutborders.org/site/wp-content/uploads/Final-EWB-Ele-Pop-Trends-KAZA-report-Mar24.pdf>

¹¹ <https://cnrgzim.org/press-releases/cnrg-statement-on-elephant-culling/>

¹² <https://english.news.cn/20241002/3090c0957d4f46c6b4a432115c363fd7/c.html>

¹³ <https://www.proelephantnetwork.org/2024/08/30/namibias-unconscionable-plan-to-kill-83-elephants/>

¹⁴ <https://cnrgzim.org/press-releases/cnrg-statement-on-elephant-culling/>

¹⁵ <https://pune.news/international/wildlife-body-rejects-elephant-culling-plans-in-southern-africa-242792/>

¹⁶ <https://www.ecoexistproject.org/>

¹⁷ <https://ste-coexistence-toolbox.info/en/>