



Via Electronic Delivery

His Excellency, Mr. Hakainde Hichilema
President of the Republic of Zambia
C/o The Principal Private Secretary to the President
Mr Bradford Machila
Office of the President
LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

Honourable Minister Rodney Sikumba
Ministry of Tourism and Arts
ZAMBIA

Dr Chuma Simukonda
Director General of the Department of National Parks & Wildlife
ZAMBIA

1st December 2021

His Excellency President Hichilema,

OPEN LETTER

EXPORT OF LIVE ELEPHANTS TO QATAR ZOO

The Members of the Pro Elephant Network hereby offer our warm congratulations on your victory and our best wishes for your success as you prepare to take up the responsibilities and challenges of your high office.

The Pro Elephant Network (PREN) is an international community of diverse individuals and organizations, comprising specific expertise, from both western and eastern academies, on wild and captive elephants, including the fields of science, health, conservation, elephant welfare, economics, community leadership, social justice and the law¹.

We understand that, prior to your election, the previous administration committed to a 'State to State transfer' of two elephants to Qatar. The members of PREN together with wildlife conservationists from around the world, were alarmed to hear that the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) had captured two wild elephant calves, a male and a female, from South Luangwa National Park. These elephants were then held captive at Lusaka National Park in preparation for export. The health of the female elephant calf rapidly deteriorated and she tragically died when being

¹ [PRO ELEPHANT NETWORK](#)



sedated for transport. The male elephant calf was then exported to the Doha Zoo, which is currently closed, while a new facility is being constructed.

It is of grave concern to the members of PREN, in light of the recent tragedy, that the Zambian government is planning to attempt to capture another wild elephant calf to replace the female that died and export her to Qatar. According to press reports, the Zambian Environment minister announced that “the Zambian Government is ready to honour the bilateral obligation”².

Given their complex cognitive abilities, intelligence,³ empathy⁴ and sentience⁵, elephants have a suite of emotional responses and physical behaviours. They are highly social animals who naturally live in tight-knit herds forming strong family bonds that can last a lifetime. They are wide-ranging and require access to large, complex, stimulating ecological and social environments, and the freedom to exercise choice over their foraging options and companions.

When deprived of these basic social and emotional needs, as in captive environments, they inevitably suffer from psychological trauma and physical deterioration⁶, including the deterioration of the brain⁷. Not only are captive elephants likely to acquire physical ailments that invariably shorten their lifespan⁸, they are also prone to developing psychological issues.

Most importantly, young growing elephants crucially depend on their mothers and other family members for appropriate socialisation and learning, and to acquire important social skills and competence, and copying mechanisms for life. Taking them away from their mothers is depriving them of everything they must learn to function as a normal elephant. Male calves only leave their natal families at 12 to 15 years old while females remain together for life. Disruption of this bond through the removal of young elephants from their family groups is physically and psychologically traumatic for both the calves and remaining families and groups, with often devastating life-long lasting negative effects.

The well-documented symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)⁹ displayed as behaviour such as stereotypic weaving movements are caused by chronic depression and stress that elephants suffer in zoos and in captivity. This can be caused by capture operations, by being ripped apart from their families and then transported long-distances to *ex situ* locations and to totally unfamiliar surroundings. There is growing international recognition that the capture and export of wild elephants to captive destinations is inhumane and does not contribute to conservation. These concerns have been raised also in a document that African countries submitted to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Animals Committee¹⁰

In addition to concerns on the impact of the capture on the affected individuals and their herds, there are also concerns on the legality of this transaction: Zambia’s elephants are listed on Appendix I of CITES which generally prohibits their

² <https://www.znbc.co.zm/news/elephant-donation-to-qatar-a-state-to-state-transaction/>

³ Poole J. & Moss C. 2008. Elephant sociality and complexity In: Wemmer C. & Christen C.A. (Eds) *Elephants and Ethics*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. pp.69– 100

⁴ Bates L.A., Lee P.C., Njiraini N., Poole J. H., Sayialel K., Sayialel S., Moss C. J. & Byrne R.W. 2008. Do elephants show empathy? *Journal of consciousness Studies*, 15(10-11):204-225

⁵ Blattner C.E.2019. The recognition of animal sentience by the law. *Journal of Animal Ethics*, 9(2):121-136
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/janimaethics.9.2.0121>

⁶ Clubb R., Rowcliffe M., Lee P., Mar K.U., Moss C. & Mason G.J. 2008. Compromised survivorship in zoo elephants. *Science*, 322:1649.

⁷ Jacobs et al. 2021 Putative neural consequences of captivity for elephants and cetaceans <https://doi.org/10.1515/revneuro-2021-0100>

⁸ Wiese & Willis 2004 Calculation of longevity and life expectancy in captive elephants

⁹Bradshaw et al, 2005. Elephant Breakdown; Bell Rizzolo J. et al, 20016. Prevalence and Patterns of Complex PTSD in Asian Elephants (*Elephas maximus*)

¹⁰ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/ac/31/Docs/E-AC31-18-02.pdf>



exportation. CITES only allows for exemptions under very narrow circumstances and when the ex- and importing country has issued permits after ensuring that:

- the animals are used for primarily non-commercial purposes
- live animals are so prepared and shipped as to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment
- when the offtake is not detrimental to the species and
- when the recipient facility is suitably equipped to house and care for the specimen.

It is, therefore, questionable whether these conditions have been adequately fulfilled and appropriate permits have been issued. Given the circumstances described above, including the death of one elephant during preparations for export and the fact that the intended recipient facility has not even been finalized, we must formally interject. Furthermore, Qatar has at best only basic animal welfare regulations, we are not inspired with confidence that any elephants exported to Qatar will receive the best possible care.

Mr President, we respectfully request that you reject the previous administration's decision to donate these elephants to Qatar, as it does not reflect the values of your new progressive Government and could harm Zambia's reputation as a nation which values its natural heritage. We urge you to intervene and ban the capture of wild elephants for export from Zambia to ex situ locations.

Every remaining wild elephant in Zambia is an important part of Zambia's natural heritage, and should be treasured as such. Adopting such a mindset and attitude, and recognizing the crucial role that elephants play in the forest ecosystems is vital for the survival of the species, which has been listed as Endangered by the IUCN.

We stand ready to provide further input and evidence, based on the experience and expertise of our members¹¹.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stefania Falcon'.

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¹¹ [Members of PREN – PRO ELEPHANT NETWORK](#)



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