



Joint open letter to

Dr. Ramchandra Kandel, Director General

Dr. Ganesh Pant, Senior Conservation Officer Chitwan National Park

Ministry of Forests and Environment

Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation

Babar Mahal, Kathmandu, Nepal

Cc:

Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation

Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal

Nepal Tourism Board

Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu

Office of the President of Nepal

Rashtrapati Bhawan, Kathmandu, Nepal

December 20th, 2024

Dear Honourable Director General and Senior Conservation Officer,

We, the undersigned, express our serious concerns about the plans to include inhumane elephant activities, such as elephant polo, elephant football and elephant racing, during the Chitwan Elephant and Tourism festival in Sauraha, Chitwan. Elephant polo and football requires elephants to have been trained cruelly, exposes them to risks of injuries and maltreatment during the tournament, and reinforces an outdated view that it is okay to use these endangered wild animals for entertainment.

We call on the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) to prevent the participation of government-owned elephants at the tournament, encourage private owners to recall the participation of their elephants, and that DNPWC and private owners draft policies that will prohibit such practices in the future.

At a press conference in Kathmandu, the festival organizing committee noted that 80 government and private owned elephants will participate in the 18th Chitwan Elephant and Tourism Festival to be held in Sauraha, Chitwan from December 26th to December 30th.

Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) are considered endangered by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and their wild population trend is decreasing. A significant number of Asian elephants are maintained in captivity by most range states, Nepal included. Nepal's government-owned elephants are primarily used for patrolling the national parks and thus contribute to the preservation of natural habitat. In contrast, the privately owned elephants are commonly engaged in tourism activities, such as elephant-back safaris.

Over the past decades, a mindset shift has taken place in tourists and travel companies, recognizing that elephant riding, elephant performances and direct interactions between visitors and elephants are unacceptable. These activities rely on cruel training, separation of



calves from their mothers, restraint through chains or small enclosures, poor nutrition, inadequate veterinary care and punishment based daily management. Many travel companies instead seek elephant-friendly attractions, such as observing elephants in their natural habitat – either in the wild or in sanctuaries or similar progressive captive facilities that ensure best possible captive welfare, while preventing the breeding of a new generation of elephants.

The planned integration of elephant polo and football activities during the upcoming Chitwan Elephant and Tourism festival will likely be perceived by many global leaders in the travel industry and travellers to Nepal as a step back, significantly reducing Nepal's attractiveness as a tourist destination.

With this letter we, the undersigned, call on the DNPWC to take the opportunity to mitigate this event's negative impact on Nepal's elephants and its international reputation by:

1. Issuing an order for government-owned elephants to not participate in the festival
2. Encouraging the festival organizing committee to remove all elephant performance related activities
3. Developing policies or regulations that prohibit or phase out the use of elephants for entertainment in future festivals and other tourism activities.

Sincerely, the following signatories:

Organisations:

ACTAsia

Animal Defenders International (ADI)

Animal Defense Partnership (ADP)

Animal People Inc

Animals Asia Foundation (AAF)

Animals Australia

ANIMONDIAL

Bears in Mind

Born Free Foundation

Born Free USA

Community Dog Welfare Kopan

Compassion Unlimited Plus Action (CUPA)

Conservation Action Network Indonesia (CAN Indonesia)

Earth Island Institute Asia Pacific (EII-AP)

Elephants in Japan (EIJ)

Ethical Seafood Research Ltd. (ESR)

FOUR PAWS UK

Free Bunka

Freedom for Animals (FFA)

Future for Elephants e.V.

Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS)

Hollow Paws

In Defense of Animals USA

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)



Japan Anti-Vivisection Association (JAVA)
JK Wildlife Pte Ltd (JKW)
Kalaweit
Landmark Foundation (LMF)
Lifelong Animal Protection (LAP)
Monkey Guarding
Nepal Animal Welfare and Research Center (NAWRC)
Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA)
Prime Earth Education (Prime Earth)
Pro Wildlife
Put an End to Animal Cruelty and Exploitation (PEACE)
Save The Asian Elephants (STAE)
Sinergia Animal
Sintesia Animalia Indonesia (Sintesia)
Society for Animal Welfare and Management (SAWM)
Soi Dog Foundation
Sour Strays Welfare (SSW)
Stray Relief and Animal Welfare (STRAW India)
Stripes and Green Earth Foundation (SAGE Foundation)
Susy Utzinger Stiftung für Tierschutz / Susy Utzinger Animal Welfare Foundation (SUST)
Thrive Philanthropy
Voice4Lions
Voices for Asian Elephants
Wanicare Foundation
Whale & Dolphin Conservation (WDC)
WildChoices, South Africa
Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre India (WRRRC)
World Animal Protection

Professional individuals, active in elephant and wildlife protection:

Dr Brett Bard Veterinarian - South Africa
Dr Jessica Bell Rizzolo Postdoctoral Researcher, the Conservation Criminology Lab, Dep of Fisheries and Wildlife, Michigan State University – USA
Megan Carr, Rhinos in Africa - South Africa
Janey Clegg Committee Member, SPCA Mutare – Zimbabwe
Lenin Chisaira Founder, Advocates 4 Earth – Green Law Connect – Zimbabwe
Dr Betsy Coville Exotic / Wildlife Animal Veterinarian – USA
Dr Harvey Croze DPhil (Oxon) Collaborating Researcher – Amboseli Trust for Elephants – Kenya
Nomusa Dube Founder, Zimbabwe Elephant Foundation – Zimbabwe
David Ebert Advocate, Founder Director of The Animal Defense Partnership – USA
Stefania Falcon Co-Director Green Group Simonstown, Founder Future 4 Wildlife Africa – South Africa
Michele Franko Captive Elephant Caregiver and Advocate – USA
Dr Marion E. Garai Elephant Behaviour Specialist, IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group member - South Africa



Georgina Groves Animal Welfare and Strategy Consultant, Chair of the Board of Directors
Crustacean Compassion – United Kingdom

Dr Ross Harvey Environmental Economist – Botswana

Heike Henderson-Altenstein Co-Founder, Future for Elephants e.V. – Germany

Iris Ho Elephant Policy Consultant and Head of Campaigns and Policy for Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA)

Sangita Iyer B.Sc., M.A., Founder of Voice for Asian Elephants Society, Nat Geo Explorer and Wildlife Filmmaker – Canada

Professor Bob Jacobs Neuroscience Researcher – Colorado College – USA

Lynne James Independent, Elephant Conservation – Zimbabwe

Dr Mark Jones Veterinarian, Head of Policy, Born Free Foundation – United Kingdom

David Kabambo Founder Director of Peace for Conservation – Wildlife Management – Tanzania

Dr Paula Kahumbu Founder, CEO WildlifeDirect – Kenya

Jim Karani Advocate, Lawyers for Animal Protection in Africa – Kenya

Professor Mohan Kharel Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu - Nepal

Dr Winnie Kiiru Founder, Conservation Kenya – Kenya

Brigitte Kornetzky President and Founder of Elefanten in Not - Switzerland / India

Kahindi Lekalhaile Africa Network for Animal Welfare – Kenya

Chris Lewis Captivity Research Officer, Born Free Foundation – United Kingdom

Dr Smaragda Louw Director, Ban Animal Trading - South Africa

Linda Masudze Advocate 4 Earth – Zimbabwe

Duncan McNair Lawyer, CEO of Save The Asian Elephants – United Kingdom

Varda Mehrotra Co-Founder, Samayu, A Just World – India

Dr Cynthia Moss Director, Amboseli Trust for Elephants – Kenya

Dr Nurzhafarina Binti Othman Founder Seratu Aatai, Elephant Conservation and Research Co-Ordinator HUTAN-KOCP – Malaysia

Tina Papadopoulou Biologist, Co-Founder of Friends of Bunka

Michele Pickover, Executive Director, EMS Foundation - South Africa

Sharon Pincott Elephant Behavioural Specialist, ex-Hwange – Zimbabwe

Bharati Ramachandran CEO of the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations – India

Ian Redmond OBE Founder, African Ele-Fund and Elefriends Campaign, Chairman of Ape Alliance and Co-founder of Rebalance Earth – United Kingdom

Dr Jan Schmidt-Burbach Veterinarian, Director of Wildlife Research and Veterinary Expertise, World Animal Protection Denmark – Denmark

Dr DJ Schubert Wildlife Biologist, Animal Welfare Institute – USA

Mark Stratton Investigative Journalist, Founder of Friends of Bunka

Dr Liz Tyson Animal Welfare Law, Programs Director - Born Free USA

Vasanthi Vadi Trustee of the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations – India

Prof Dan Wylie Rhodes University - South Africa