



To **President Ursula von der Leyen**

To **Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans**
European Green Deal

To **Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius**
Environment, Oceans and Fisheries

European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 12th May 2020

Subject: Closure of domestic ivory markets in the European Union (EU)

Dear President von der Leyen,
Dear Executive Vice-President Timmermans,
Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

We, the undersigned organisations, urge the European Commission to close the EU domestic ivory market and implement a ban on all ivory imports and (re)exports, without further delays.

We are currently living through a difficult period with the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacting our health, wellbeing, and economies. The emergence of infectious diseases like COVID-19, that spread from wildlife to humans, provides a stark demonstration of the dramatic societal and economic costs that can result from the destruction of nature and unchecked commercial trade in wildlife. We welcome announcements that recovery from this crisis will require a rethinking of the EU economic system and a new green transition. Such a transition needs to include a comprehensive EU-wide ban on the import, (re)export, and internal trade in ivory.

Elephant populations continue to decline significantly in Africa. Each year, at least 20,000 African elephants are killed illegally for their ivory and only bold action can save this iconic species from becoming extinct in many parts of its range.

The EU Commission has been considering further steps to take with regard to the ivory trade within, to and from the EU for the past few years, but with little progress and no clearly defined process or timeframe. It is now almost three years since DG Environment conducted a public consultation on the issue, which closed in December 2017, resulting in almost 90,000 responses. This was the third highest number of responses ever to an EU public consultation showing the high level of interest EU citizens have in this issue, with 92% of respondents favouring the closure of EU ivory markets.

There has been growing political pressure from a wide range of stakeholders on the European Commission to address this issue in recent years. They include: African government members of the Elephant Protection Initiative and the African Elephant Coalition; Members of the European Parliament; several EU Member States; a concerned group of 165 scientists in 33 countries worldwide (including from within 13 EU countries); leading environmental NGOs; companies such as eBay; and religious and faith leaders (see the Annex). All have urged the EU to implement a total ban on the commercial ivory trade, including closure of its domestic market, without further delay.

The poaching of African elephants continues at high levels. If the EU does not act now, it may be too late. We very much welcome the European Green Deal, described by President von der Leyen as Europe's 'man on the moon' moment when published in December 2019 and which we hope will herald the start of a new era of European decision-making, in which protection of the environment, safeguarding global biodiversity and comprehensively tackling the over-exploitation of wildlife are mainstreamed into political decision-making. As the Commission prepares to adopt the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, so critical to achieving the objectives of the Green Deal, you have an opportunity to demonstrate global leadership by closing the EU ivory market and urging other countries to do the same.

Your global leadership on this issue is essential.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Janice Weatherley-Singh
Director, EU Strategic Relations, WCS EU

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Executive Director, Environmental Investigation Agency, UK (EIA)

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EU Office Director, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)

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