



# Animal Welfare Institute

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BY ELECTRONIC MAIL

Representative David L. Deen, Chairman  
Committee on Fish, Wildlife, and Water Resources  
Vermont General Assembly  
Vermont State House  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Chairman Deen:

On behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) and its constituents who reside in Vermont, I am writing to strongly encourage your support for H. 297, a bill to prohibit the import, sale, offer for sale, purchase, barter, or possession with intent to sell of any ivory, ivory product, rhinoceros horn, or rhinoceros horn product.

African elephants and rhinos are being systematically destroyed by poachers to feed the demand for ivory and rhino horn products primarily in Asia. Remarkably, however, the United States is the second largest destination for illegal or “blood” ivory and is also a destination for products manufactured from the horns of poached rhinos. According to scientists, nearly 100 elephants are being illegally slaughtered every day in Africa for their ivory. As documented by many law enforcement agencies and other experts, much of this poaching is being done by criminal syndicates and terrorist organizations that use the profits from the sale of illicit ivory to fuel their criminal and terrorism activities. Indeed, Al-Shabaab, the terrorist organization behind the September 2013 Westgate shopping mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya – which took the lives of over 70 people and last week’s recent mass-killing of nearly 150 people, nearly all students, at Garrissa University College in Kenya – is known to profit from the illegal killing of elephants and the trade in their ivory.

According to scientists, some elephant populations have already been lost to this poaching scourge, others have had their numbers slashed by 80 percent or more, and many may be extirpated within the decade if this relentless killing is not stopped. Past attempts at “legalizing” the sale of ivory were intended to reduce global demand for ivory and ivory products. Unfortunately, exactly the opposite has happened, as demand has skyrocketed leading to a massive increase in the illegal slaughter of these magnificent animals. According to preliminary, continent-wide, population estimates, there are far fewer than 500,000 elephants remaining in Africa compared to 3-5 million in the 1930s.

In the early twentieth century, an estimated 500,000 rhinos roamed throughout eastern, central, and southern Africa. Today, there are less than 24,000, including only slightly more than 20,000 white rhinos and less than 3,500 black rhinos. Poaching for rhino horns has substantially

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increased in the past eight years from 13 white rhinos reported killed illegally in South Africa in 2007 to 1,215 in 2014. This killing spree is largely a product of a rumor started in Vietnam that rhino horn could cure cancer even though rhino horn, made out of the same keratin found in fingernails, toenails and hair, has no medicinal value. Today, in addition to being a mythical cure for cancer, powdered rhino horn is also believed to cure hangovers and some horns are acquired simply as an investment.

The United States should not be culpable in the decimation of these iconic African animals. This is precisely why the federal government, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, continues to enforce strong measures restricting trade in rhino horns and has further restricted its rules regarding ivory imports and exports (with further restrictions to be proposed in the near future). Vermont could assist in these efforts by adopting a statewide prohibition on the import, sale, offer for sale, purchase, barter, or possession with intent to sell any ivory, ivory product, rhinoceros horn, or rhinoceros horn product as is called for under H. 297. AWI notes that H. 297 does not prevent the conveyance of ivory to legal beneficiaries, does not apply to law enforcement officers when conducting an investigation, does not prohibit the import of ivory if allowed under federal law, and provides a mechanism for the donation of ivory, rhino horn, or products made from ivory or rhino horn for any bona fide educational or scientific purpose unless such use is prohibited under federal law.

H.297 represents a significant and important step toward ensuring that Vermont is not contributing to the decimation of elephants and rhinos in Africa. By supporting this legislation you will be contributing to the global effort to save these remarkable species for the benefit of the African people, the tourism economies of African countries that provide habitat for these species, and to everyone throughout Vermont, the United States, and the world who cherishes these species. For these reasons, AWI strongly encourages you to vote in favor of H. 297.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Cathy Liss  
President

cc: Representative James McCullough, Vice Chair  
Representative Steve Beyor, Ranking Member  
Representative Robert Krebs  
Representative Paul Lefebvre, Clerk  
Representative Amy Sheldon  
Representative Thomas Terenzini  
Representative Kathryn Webb  
Representative Janssen Willhoit