

Submission to the House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Water Resources, the Vermont State Legislature, on an act relating to the sale of ivory or rhinoceros horn

Rachelle Adam, April 3, 2015

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to submit in writing my support for the act relating to the sale of ivory or rhinoceros horn. My submission addresses the critical importance of this act in shutting down the domestic ivory trade in Vermont, as well as its potential impact on both national and global efforts in combatting the worsening wildlife crisis.

The current wave of poaching of elephants for ivory is the most critical since the 1980s. The numbers killed have more than doubled since 2007 and more than tripled since 1998.¹ Between 2010 and 2012 over 100,000 African elephants were slaughtered for their ivory. From a population of *26 million* elephants in 1800, African elephants today number about four hundred thousand.² Demand for ivory now exceeds supply: starting from 2010, poaching rates (estimated at one elephant killed every fifteen minutes) outnumber elephants' rates of reproduction and scientists estimate the species' extinction in the wild in about a decade.³ The rampage of killing has triggered global outrage and revulsion over atrocities inflicted on animals displaying intelligence, emotions, and compassion – in other words, sharing those traits that we humans have persistently and erroneously believed are ours alone.

China, the fastest growing economy in the world, is rightly vilified as the force behind this current wave of poaching, driven by the country's newly found wealth and purchasing power. Yet while “the demographics of China absolutely swamp everything,”⁴ China is not the only culpable party: the United States has the second largest ivory market in the world (followed by the European Union). In response, the Obama administration has tightened policy measures and regulations to clamp down on the illegal ivory trade coming into the United States. But their major loophole remains legal domestic markets that are driving the ivory trade and the poaching that supplies it. So to support and strengthen the almost total ban on the *supply* of ivory coming through US borders, the *demand* for ivory must be outlawed as well.

Thus the illegal ivory trade is thriving because of the domestic consumer at the end of the chain greedy for the poached ivory and willing to pay spectacularly high prices for it. By addressing demand and prohibiting all trade in ivory including its *purchase*, this act signifies a paradigm shift in tackling the trade by confronting consumer responsibility. Globalization has made the world much smaller and interconnected, creating a dense and intricate web of cause and effect

¹Allgood, Ratchford, LFontaine, *U.S. Ivory trade: Can a crackdown on Trafficking save the last Titan?* ANIMAL LAW Vol 20, 27 (2013), at 33:

² *The History of the Ivory Trade*, National Geographic,
http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/history-ivory-trade/?ar_a=1

³ Vira, Ewing Miller, Out of Africa, MAPPING THE GLOBAL TRADE IN ILLICIT ELEPHANT IVORY, August 2014, at 6

⁴ “Ivory and Insecurity: the global implications of trafficking in Africa, before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, May 24 2012, testimony of Iain Douglas-Hamilton, quoting Toom Milliken, at 11.

amongst nations and peoples geographically separated by vast distances. For example, are consumers in the United States, by purchasing a product – any product - with the ubiquitous label “Made in China” contributing to the slaughter of elephants in Africa, by generating the wealth that enables the Chinese to buy ivory? And specifically in regard to the consumption of ivory, clearly a buyer of ivory in the United States must bear responsibility for the devastation and terror inflicted by criminals and terrorists operating the poaching in Africa, terrorizing human beings and wildlife alike.

Close to twenty states have already adopted or are in various stages of legislating laws prohibiting the ivory trade.⁵ Beyond their *domestic* domino effect, these state laws have a potential *global* domino effect - country after country shutting down domestic ivory markets in their wake. Historically, the United States has proven itself a formidable world leader for the global environment. In particular, it has always displayed a keen concern over African wildlife, going back to the 1930s and the American Committee for International Wildlife Protection, whose founding members were driven by a shared passion for African mega-fauna and a deep apprehension over impending extinctions of their species. The United States was the power behind iconic international agreements such as the World Heritage Convention and the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Continuing this historic role, state laws outlawing the domestic ivory trade can impact the laws and policies of China and other drivers of ivory poaching. They are already proving their international impact: at an initial meeting at which I reported on the New Jersey and New York laws banning the ivory trade in these states and the Vermont bill as well, Israeli wildlife officials are now considering a similar national law. By forging a network of unilateral ivory bans that will collectively comprise a powerful international force, these laws can create new norms of consumption, deligitimizing ivory.

This Bill is a direct response to those vicious perpetrators of atrocities against both humans and non-human species and the darkness they threaten to inflict upon our souls as global witnesses to their crimes of devastation and extinction. The current wave of state laws shutting down domestic markets symbolize the coming together of communities to defy these acts of horror that menace our spirit and our humanity, giving force to the universal principle that all of us – humans, elephants, and other species – are entitled to life, entitled to caring for our children free of fear and violence, and to live peacefully in our own habitats on a safe and sustainable earth.

I will be happy to answer questions, submit additional information, and generally assist the Committee in their work promoting this Bill.

⁵ Is ivory trading legal in your state? <https://www.thedodo.com/community/elephantsdc/ivory-bans-sweep-the-nation-1020446911.html>