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Worldwide protests target Japan's porpoise hunts



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More than 60 international environmental groups are today staging protests outside Japanese embassies across the world to demand an end to Japan's dolphin and porpoise hunts.

The protests in 31 cities, including London, Washington and Rio are against the whaling nation's annual slaughter of some 20,000 dolphins and porpoises. Protesters dressed in red and wearing a red flower will deliver messages to Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda calling for an end to the slaughter.

More than 16,000 Dall's porpoises are killed in hand-thrown harpoon hunts in northern Japan. A further 2,000 dolphins are driven into shallow coves and slaughtered for their meat.

The Dall's porpoise is known for its tendency to ride the bow of boats making it popular with whale watching tourists. Hunters target nursing porpoises leaving the dependent calves to starve.

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) has repeatedly called for a ban on the porpoise and dolphins hunts. Its scientific committee has expressed concerns about a dramatic reduction in the small cetaceans' population but the Japanese government refuses to cooperate.

Globally, small cetaceans are under increasing threat from direct hunting, entanglement in fishing gears, over-fishing of prey species and pollution.

Andy Ottaway, director of pressure group, Campaign Whale, said: "Dolphins and porpoises are being slaughtered in their thousands in Japanese water, and unlike the larger whales, this secret slaughter continues with little being done to stop it. Even the Japanese public are largely unaware that these appallingly cruel hunts are taking place."

Jennifer Lonsdale, director of the Environmental Investigation Agency, said: "People in Japan are unwittingly buying and eating dolphin and porpoise meat. We are demanding that Japan takes dolphins and porpoises off the menu."

Tested meat has found dangerously high levels of toxic chemicals. Town councillors in the dolphin-hunting centre of Taiji have called for a ban on the use of dolphin and whale meat in school lunches because of the toxins.

. The following clarification was printed in the Guardian's Corrections and clarifications column, Monday October 1 2007. We said that protesters would deliver a petition to Shinzo Abe, the Japanese prime minister. Mr Abe resigned on September 12. His successor, Yasuo Fukuda, was elected on September 25. This has been corrected.