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Contact: Allan Thornton
+1 202 483-6621



OBAMA ADMINISTRATION POISED TO DECIDE FATE OF AFRICAN ELEPHANTS

Washington DC – March 19, 2010: The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) has appealed to President Obama and the US government to support Kenya, the birthplace of Obama’s father, which is leading efforts by 20 African nations to maintain elephant protection and oppose ivory trade at the CITES meeting in Doha. On Monday delegates will vote on whether to “downlist” elephant populations from Zambia and Tanzania from the protected level of “Appendix 1” to enable resumed ivory trade.

A new report by EIA (**Open Season: The Burgeoning Illegal Ivory Trade in Tanzania and Zambia**) has documented extensive illegal trade networks in Zambia and Tanzania that work with Asian ivory brokers and corrupt officials to circumvent weak enforcement efforts. Both nations, backed by the ivory consuming giants of China and Japan, are pressing to eliminate protections that prohibit international trade.

Japan, with China has led successful efforts at this year’s meetings to prevent CITES from protecting other endangered species such as Bluefin tuna.

EIA President Allan Thornton stated, “Japan’s 15,000 ivory wholesalers and retail outlets have an insatiable appetite for ivory, and China is the world’s biggest importer of illegal ivory. Together they have used the charade of legal ivory sales to smuggle and launder ivory taken from thousands of elephants slaughtered across Africa.”

Soaring prices for ivory in Japan and China have driven demand, and rapid growth in the Chinese presence across Africa has overwhelmed the ability of even the best enforcement teams in Africa to protect their elephants from a tidal wave of poaching. A single ivory tusk on sale in one of China’s Government Friendship stores was offered for \$130,000.

The Zambian Government has been secretly relabeling poached ivory tusks as “natural mortality” to enable their sale, against CITES rules, in a future ivory sale. Tanzania lost 30,000 elephants between 2006 and 2009, mainly to poaching and is the world’s largest source of illegal ivory - over 12,000 kgs of tusks were seized in Asia in 2009 alone.

“This is the last stand for Africa’s elephant populations” said Thornton. “CITES’ decision to allow a legal ivory sale in 2008 resurrected the Asian ivory trade and caused a massive and devastating increase in demand. Removing protection for more elephant populations will signal Japanese and Chinese ivory buyers and tens of thousands more of Africa’s rapidly vanishing elephants will die in the killing fields of Africa.

For further information, contact:

Allan Thornton at 202 483 6621/202 361-6941 or, **Samuel LaBudde** at 415 632-7174.

To view or download the report, *Open Season: The Burgeoning Illegal Ivory Trade in Tanzania and Zambia*, visit <http://www.eia-global.org/PDF/report--OpenSeason--Species--mar10.pdf>

EIA Undercover video available on request