

Thailand's Position on Animal Rights and Elephant Protection

1. Thailand's Position on Animal Rights and International Cooperation

The Royal Thai Government attaches great importance to the protection and preservation of elephants. As party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora – CITES since 1983, Thailand strictly adheres to the obligations under the Convention particularly on the domestic ivory trade and other related problems, elephants smuggling and cruel treatments of animals.

The key domestic legal framework is the Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act B.E. 2535 (1992), which prohibits hunting, breeding, possessing and trading including the importing and exporting of wild animals on the 'Prohibition List', taking into account the species identified in the CITES appendices.

2. Developments of the Elephant Act

On 23 April 2009 the Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment) held a meeting on "Policy on Tackling Thai Elephants Crisis" participated by various stakeholders (relevant authorities, local administrations and NGOs). It was an opinion hearing session on the recommendations made by the Thai National Economic and Social Advisory Council on a comprehensive policy to protect the elephants. The outcome focused on 5 important development areas namely:

5.1 Elephant registration – Issuance of modern elephant registration, which will include health record, microchip number and parents' DNA information. The new elephant registration should be completed within 2 years (2011).

5.2 Sending Thai elephants abroad – Thailand will send Thai elephants abroad only for research purposes and/or intergovernmental cooperation as allowed by CITES. However, there will be a temporary moratorium until the new registration process is completed.

5.3 Tackling the problem of stray elephants – The local administration (Bangkok Metropolitan and Surin Province: home to most Thai elephants), together with the Thailand Zoological Park Organization and Forest Industry Organization have proposed many projects to support stray elephants to return to their native environment as well as find suitable and sustainable jobs for mahouts in Elephant Preservation Centers and National Parks.

5.4 Protecting wild elephants – by compiling genetic database of all wild elephants in the country with a view to effectively enforce relevant laws particularly on the capture of wild elephants and their ivory trade.

5.5 Legislation of "Elephant Act" – A public referendum on the draft Elephant Act is scheduled on 30 June 2009, the result of which will be used to amend the draft act as appropriate before submission to the cabinet. Once approved by the cabinet, the draft act will then be submitted to parliament for its approval. Meanwhile, a National Level Committee has been set up to supervise the national elephant policy.