



October 2, 2008

Mr Chalernsak Wanichsombat  
 Director General  
 National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department  
 61 Phaholyothin Road  
 Ladyao, Chatuchak  
 Bangkok 10900  
 Thailand  
 Email: dg@dnp.go.th  
 Fax: +66 2 561 4836

Dear Director General Wanichsombat,

The International Tiger Coalition is an alliance of 39 organisations and represents some of the world’s foremost tiger scientists, conservation groups, animal welfare advocates, Traditional Chinese Medicine specialists and zoos. We are united by a deep commitment to wild tigers and their habitats. On behalf of millions of members and constituents, the groups named below express to you their concern about the captive breeding and trans-border movements of tigers by the Tiger Temple in Kanchanaburi, and about the facility’s claims to support tiger conservation.

The world’s wild tigers struggle for survival. There are possibly fewer than 3,500 tigers left on our planet – scattered across 14 range states in increasingly isolated enclaves. Numbers are believed to be declining even faster than anticipated, and tigers now occupy a mere 7% of their historical range.

International tiger trade has contributed a great deal to the demise of wild tigers and is prohibited under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It is also banned domestically in many countries, including Thailand. Range states play a particularly important role in saving the world’s remaining tigers by bringing an end to activities that undermine the species’ survival in the wild. All governments throughout the species’ range must therefore demonstrate a sincere resolve and lasting commitment to its protection. Thailand’s recent establishment of a National Wildlife Law Network Committee, a Programme Co-ordination Unit of ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Networks and a new Wildlife Task Force to help fight illegal wildlife trade will no doubt greatly support these goals. The unchallenged import and export of at least 12 tigers to and from the Tiger Temple across the border with Laos, without the necessary permits, is therefore of great concern to us.

Our second concern relates to tiger breeding at the Temple facility, which has no credible connection with accredited conservation breeding programmes that are deemed to support the survival of wild tigers. You may be aware that in 2007, CITES adopted Decision 14.69 which states that “Parties with intensive operations breeding tigers on a commercial scale shall implement measures to restrict the captive population to a level supportive only to conserving wild tigers; tigers should not be bred for trade in their parts and derivatives”. It should first be noted that circumstances in which the release of captive-bred tigers to the wild can make a contribution to the conservation of wild tigers are virtually non-existent. They must also include the elimination of all causes of population decline and the absence of an existing wild population that is able to increase naturally. These circumstances do not exist in Thailand (or any other tiger range state), and even if they did, reintroduction of captive bred tigers would be extremely difficult, prohibitively expensive and time-consuming.

In addition, the Temple's tigers would be unsuitable for such a release for a range of reasons. Firstly, breeding at the Tiger Temple has been random and has likely resulted in subspecies hybrids between parent animals of unknown pedigree, as well as in damaging levels of inbreeding. Secondly, there is the added complication that with tigers as used to human proximity as these are, release would be dangerous and potentially fatal for the tigers, for livestock and quite possibly for humans.

It is generally accepted that the number of tigers in captivity already greatly exceeds the number of tigers left in the wild. However, the conservation contribution of the vast majority of this captive population is negligible. The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) undertakes to maximise the contribution of captive breeding to the conservation of wild tigers. Of the tens of thousands of captive tigers, WAZA identifies only around 1,000 suitable individuals. We do not need more captive tigers, but more tigers in the wild.

Tigers can be saved most effectively by protecting the habitat and prey of existing wild populations, through uncompromising law enforcement, as well as by eradicating demand. The future of tigers is precarious and there is no margin left for error. Tigers will not survive another decade of losses like the last. With so few of these animals left, we must all act decisively and boldly to eliminate all threats to wild tigers. This includes bringing an end of all tiger trade to prevent any further losses to wild populations, and ultimately to bring tigers back.

We welcome your plans to commission genetic testing of the tigers held at the Temple to determine their subspecies and pedigree. However, we note that whatever the results of these tests may be, breeding of tigers *ex situ* makes no contribution whatsoever to wild tiger conservation unless the animals are included in a multi-institutional conservation breeding programme carefully designed and managed so as to generate conservation benefits. The Temple does not have the facilities, the skills, the relationships with accredited zoos, or even the desire to manage its tigers in an appropriate fashion. Instead, it is motivated both in display of the tigers to tourists and in its illegal trading of tigers purely by profit. We appeal to you most strongly to remove all tigers from the Tiger Temple and transfer them to a more suitable and safe sanctuary facility, where the animals can be accommodated and cared for appropriately and that will not allow for additional breeding. Care for the Wild International has identified a suitable facility in Thailand and is offering its full support for this operation. We also urge the DNP to conduct a full independent investigation into the illegal breeding and exchange of tigers.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and for all your government has already done to safeguard the future of wild tigers.

With sincere regards,

The Following Members of the International Tiger Coalition:

**American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine \* AMUR \* Animal Welfare Institute \*  
Animals Asia Foundation \* Association of Zoos & Aquariums \* Big Cat Rescue \*  
Born Free Foundation \* Born Free USA \* British and Irish Association of Zoos & Aquariums \*  
Care for the Wild International \* Conservation International \*  
Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine \* David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation \*  
Education for Nature – Vietnam \* Environmental Investigation Agency \* Global Tiger Patrol \*  
Humane Society International \* Humane Society of the United States \*  
International Fund for Animal Welfare \* International Trust for Nature Conservation \*  
PeunPa \* Phoenix Fund \* Save The Tiger Fund \* Species Survival Network \*  
The Fund For The Tiger \* Tigris Foundation \* Tour Operators for Tigers \*  
TRAFFIC \* 21st Century Tiger \* WildAid \* Wildlife Alliance \* Wildlife Conservation Nepal \*  
Wildlife Trust of India \* Wildlife Watch Group \*  
World Association of Zoos & Aquariums \* World Society for the Protection of Animals \*  
World Wildlife Fund \* Zoological Society of London**