

**COMMENTS OF GODFREY HARRIS,  
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BEFORE THE RULES, ELECTION,  
AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL  
RELATIONS COMMITTEE OF THE  
LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL**

ENHANCING  
UNDERSTANDING  
OF THE  
HISTORIC,  
PRACTICAL, AND  
CULTURAL  
IMPORTANCE  
OF IVORY



**Ivory Education Institute  
Political Action Network/  
International Ivory Society**

No one in this country wishes ill of elephants in the wild. No one in this country desires to own something made from or with ivory wrought from poached elephants. Those of us who understand and appreciate the historic, cultural, practical, scientific, and artistic value of ivory applaud anyone who registers their abhorrence to the willful slaughter of elephants by criminal gangs.

But banning the trade and movement of ivory objects in California, as AB 96 seeks to do, won't save elephants in Africa. In fact, it will likely do them more harm than good:

It's basic economics. If supply is squeezed without addressing demand, prices rise. The higher the value of ivory, the more incentive poachers have to take risks to kill elephants to earn more profit.

If, on the other hand, you were to advocate the creation of a sustained, internationally controlled, market for legally taken raw ivory to maintain stable values, the criminals who hire poachers would have to look to other sources of income to prosper.

Given the dismal results of other governmental attempts to change reality, do you really need reminding that:

Prohibition failed to halt the sale of liquor in the U.S., that the War on Drugs has not stopped the sale of banned substances on our streets, and that giant fences, electronic devices, and added boots on the ground have not stemmed the flow of illegal immigrants.

Why, then, would anyone think that banning the sale of ivory in California will somehow magically make the demand for ivory in Asia go away? All it will do is push California's small market in ivory objects underground or drive it across the desert to Nevada.

Let me pose another, more basic LA question:

How is your vote to suppress any further enrichment to be derived from objects made from or with ivory any different from the Taliban blowing up Buddhist statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, or from what the Islamic State has just done with sledge hammers and flames in Mosul, Iraq? How is banning all private

ownership of ivory objects something a world cultural center like Los Angeles can openly condone?

Do you really want the record to show that you favored prohibiting musical instruments, chess boards, heirloom jewelry, religious symbols, serving pieces with ivory handles, guns and knives with ivory grips, and historic medical and scientific instruments, as well as some of the finest art pieces on the planet, from being part of the culture of Los Angeles?

Now some truth to counter the constantly repeated, but generally erroneous mantras about the current situation with ivory:

**FACT** The UN's elephant monitoring program just released figures that show poaching has been level for the past two years and is the same as it was in 2010. While still unsustainably high in Central African countries, it is nowhere near the 96 elephants killed per day in AB 96's designation. Moreover, elephant poaching is no longer a real threat to Eastern or Southern African countries where herds are thriving in conjunction with populations who benefit from the animals in their midst.

**FACT** Many forms of ivory do not come from elephants or endangered species. How can anyone think that banning ivory from extinct animals such as Mastodons and mammoths or ivory from non-threatened animals such as walruses, narwhals, boars and warthogs will save elephants in Africa?

**FACT** The states of Washington, Oklahoma, Iowa and Virginia have already rejected similar bans on the trade and movement of ivory in their states. They have recognized the futility of trying to influence the behavior of East Asian consumers by penalizing Americans for their cultural interests.

Finally, why not ask Los Angeles to do something meaningful for wildlife in Africa. You can start by using LA-based talent to help Asians, particularly in countries outside of China, understand the plight of some elephant herds while bringing the demand for ivory in Southeast Asia and the Philippines, into balance with supply. Wouldn't that be better than being an accessory to the shameless programs of animal rights groups? They misuse facts to generate money for other causes while punishing Americans and potentially increasing the profits of those who kill elephants — all to keep the same immoral fund-raising cycle spinning year after year.

Thank you.

March 25, 2015

## UNDERSTANDING THE NEWS IN CONTEXT

# ELEPHANTS AND IVORY

## The Truth About the Current Situation

### A PRACTICAL SOLUTION TO THE ISSUE

LOS ANGELES — The Federal government's recent effort to ban the sale and movement of objects made from or with ivory has gone quiet for the moment, perhaps in the face of the 2014 political changes in Congress. But the election results certainly haven't slowed any of the animal rights groups from their concerted effort to demonize ivory.



These groups have simply shifted their disdain for this historic material to state capitals and major cities claiming that the country is swimming in illegal ivory. For proof, one group asked investigators to identify ivory for retail sale that "might possibly" have been worked after 1977. That could literally mean everything they saw since "might possibly" is a lot different than "was probably." While Virginia has just refused to become involved, California, Washington, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, and Kansas as well as San Francisco and now Los Angeles are being asked to pass anti-ivory legislation contrary to the interests of millions of Americans and thousands of institutions that own ivory objects.

**The 2014 Federal effort to convince the world that possessing one of its most precious materials is evil was met with strong opposition from museums, musicians, artisans, antique dealers, appraisers, auctioneers, collectors, hunters, academics, and many ordinary citizens who treasure or use objects containing ivory.**

The Federal government's approach to stopping elephant poaching seemed flawed from the outset:

- Since the market for illegal ivory products is overwhelmingly in East Asia — certifiably not the U.S. — why punish *Americans* for owning something that had been legally obtained; is of immense artistic, practical, historic, and scientific importance; and has been widely admired since time immemorial?
- How can banning trade in important cultural artifacts carved from fossilized walrus or from mammoth and mastodon tusks — animals that have been extinct for tens of thousands of years — have anything realistically to do with saving African elephants today?
- Why is it that expert opinion is good enough to determine the authenticity of paintings worth millions of dollars, but the Feds insists on seeing written documentation that never existed to determine whether an ivory object is legal or fake? Who has ever acquired a craftsman's original invoice for an ivory object he made?
- Why is it that public officials assume that the millions of ordinary citizens who have inherited or preserved countless memorable and culturally important ivory pieces can be thrown under the bus in favor of a handful of vocal animal rights extremists who claim that banning ivory in America is the most important way to save African elephants that they repeatedly claim are about to become extinct?



Only someone who hasn't been paying attention would miss the answer to these questions. It is **MONEY!** Insisting on ending the trade and movement of ivory objects to save elephants and stop terrorism raises large amounts from sympathetic donors. It doesn't much matter whether the picture is of a bull elephant taken down for its tusks or a film of two young calves playing in the mud, elephants generate enormous interest, sympathy and smiles that translate into large contributions.

**The more money that elephants can raise for animal rights groups, of course, the more powerful their leaders become in the scheme of governance. They are able to entertain lavishly, travel extensively and underwrite research gener-**

ously and they can conduct surveys, buy ads and produce documentaries to raise even more money. But most of all they can pay themselves impressive salaries and make eye-opening contributions to support the reelection of like-minded politicians under the protection of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision.

What a combination: Admired wild animals threatened by greedy, uncaring humans are saved by the concern of government leaders across the country. Impressive, but basically a *fraud*. Elephant numbers have been diminishing in certain parts of Africa, but not in others — and where the numbers are going down, the causes are not solely East Asian demand for ivory. While elephant herds have clearly suffered from the activities of poachers serving criminal gangs in the northern areas of central Africa, that isn't the full story of the cause of the reduction in some herds.



- An estimated 15% of the elephants that the extremists say are “killed” by poachers each year are actually dying from natural causes. Old age, disease, and accidents catch up with elephants just as they do with humans. Moreover, elephants everywhere in Africa and Asia are in competition with humans for land. Elephants need enormous quantities of space to forage for food and water. Some have been eliminated by locals intent on saving their crops and villages from destruction and some have been hunted as a source of food.
- In southern parts of Africa, the same competition arises but the size of the elephant herds are growing in part because managed conservation techniques, where practiced, can balance the needs and interests of local communities with those of the elephants. Once locals begin appreciating the benefits of wildlife tourism, they gain a major economic stake in protecting *their* animals. Soon, corruption decreases, herds grow and a reasonable balance between man and animal is achieved. Ancillary benefits can come from selling the tusks of deceased and culled elephants with the money used to improve living conditions.
- Researchers for the UN Environment Programme, Interpol, and the Ivory Education Institute all conclude that terrorism is not an integral aspect of wildlife trafficking in Africa. There just aren't enough elephants in the areas where al Shabab, Boko Haram, or the Lord's Resistance Army are operating to support their financial needs, especially while other much more lucrative illegal funding sources are available to them.

But animal rights advocates, who live in big Western cities and often are unaware of human factors on the ground in Africa, have been convinced to view *any* ivory market as an incentive for poachers. They point to how a 2008 one-time sale of tusks only whetted appetites for more ivory in an insatiable wave of demand. Not true. The evidence from reputable researchers indicates that the one time sale was absorbed by speculators betting on a lack of a consistent future supply and that fear pushed the price of the remaining available ivory up, in turn increasing the incentive for poachers to do their evil. It is still going on. As long as people believe that they can repeal the laws of supply and demand, illegal activities and a black market will flourish.

Most of us don't have to go too deeply into history to see other examples of the wishful thinking of naive do-gooders turned into expensive, failed government policy.

- Prohibition didn't stem the supply of alcohol or stop drinking; on the contrary, both increased dramatically.
- The War on Drugs hasn't ended marijuana and cocaine on American streets; they are still doing damage.
- Illegal immigration hasn't stopped with a fence or increased surveillance technology; it is still going on.

**The solution to the ivory question is rooted in managing demand rather than in trying to end supply. Specialists in ivory believe that if a consistent, controlled ivory marketplace were established and properly managed — using tusks in storage, tusks from animals that die of natural causes as well as culling practices, and ivory that has been recycled — it would allow for managed conservation techniques, establish a stable pricing mechanism to satisfy demand, and allow for ivory to be used for many of its historic purposes.**

The notion that American consumption of ivory products stimulates Asian demand is a myth perpetrated by animal extremists abetted by zealous public relations firms. Where is their evidence? There is, in fact, no measureable U.S. demand for ivory objects from newly harvested tusks. State and city legislators should not buy into the kind of wooly thinking or wobbly reasoning being advanced by animal rights advocates.

**They are in the game of manipulating elected officials to raise MONEY for their organizations, not to save elephants in Africa. If they were serious about the latter effort, they would stop using scare tactics, spreading false statistics, and offering half-truths, and start spending more of their huge resources on Africa's real conservation needs.**