

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 7, 2019

His Excellency Shinsuke J. Sugiyama
The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan
Embassy of Japan in the United States of America
2520 Massachusetts Avenue, NW.
Washington, DC 20008

Re: Request to Close Domestic Ivory Markets

Your Excellency:

We applaud the Japanese government for strengthening its commitment to animal protection through improvements to the Law for the Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (LCES).

Nevertheless, we remain concerned that Japan's legal ivory market is now the largest domestic ivory market in the world – with more than 16,000 registered ivory traders (retailers, manufacturers and wholesalers). **Thus, we write to urge the government of Japan to join the growing effort to close domestic ivory markets worldwide in order to conserve dwindling elephant populations.**

Between 2011 and 2016, over two tons of ivory originating from Japan was confiscated by the Chinese government¹, suggesting that a significant amount of ivory likely was smuggled out of Japan undetected by the authorities during this period. A report released in September 2018 found that 60 percent of ivory sellers interviewed were willing to sell ivory to foreign customers or domestic customers with intent to export, despite the fact that it is illegal according to Japanese law². Half of the hanko retailers surveyed for another report were willing to sell ivory hanko knowing it was destined for export. In addition, most dealers did not seem to know that the export of ivory is illegal, and a few others even offered smuggling tips³.

There is growing global recognition of the conservation crisis facing elephants, and many countries have taken action to curb the demand for ivory both at home and transnationally.

For instance, the United States is among the world's largest markets for legal and illegal wildlife products. Recognizing that our country can play a significant role in eliminating the demand for elephant ivory, a federal near-total ban on the ivory trade took effect in July 2016. That same year the United States Congress passed the Eliminate, Neutralize and Disrupt (END) Wildlife Trafficking Act to halt the poaching of imperiled species and stop the illegal wildlife trade.

¹ <https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/ivory-towers-japans-ivory-trade/>

² https://www.wwf.or.jp/activities/data/20180927_wildlife02.pdf

³ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/environmental-investigation-agency/assets/2018/10/EIA+Hanko+Report+Final.pdf>

No one country alone can solve the elephant poaching and ivory trafficking problems. As part of the joint commitment between the United States and China to protect elephants from the ivory trade, China's highest decision-making body, State Council, banned ivory commerce in 2018. Since then France, Taiwan, Luxemburg, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Singapore and the United Kingdom have adopted or will implement strict prohibitions on domestic commercial trade in ivory.

Additionally, the United Nations General Assembly, given the transnational nature of wildlife crime and the instability that poaching has caused to many countries, adopted the first-ever resolution on wildlife trafficking (UNGA A/69/L/80), "Tackling Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife" in 2015. Furthermore, one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals—Goal 15—addresses illegal wildlife trade. In addition, the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Congress passed a motion in 2016 calling on governments worldwide to close their domestic commercial ivory trades. Conservation scientists and enforcement officials worldwide acknowledge that any legal market provides an easy and convenient cover for the laundering of illicit ivory. Allowing the sale of ivory reinforces its social acceptability and makes it a desirable product to own or even invest in, further fueling the illegal market and stimulating transnational wildlife crime.

Further, the illicit trade of ivory has been linked as a source of funding for criminal and terrorist organizations.⁴

As we approach the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, we are particularly concerned the event might be exploited to facilitate transnational ivory trafficking. Tokyo will receive an influx of visitors from around the world for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Without a domestic ban on ivory sales in Japan, millions of visitors to the Olympics could unknowingly engage in the illegal ivory trade by purchasing elephant ivory products as souvenirs, bringing them home – violating not only the Japanese law but also international and their home country's laws.

In addition, many visitors will be from the African elephant range states whose elephants are being wiped out by poaching. It would be unrealistic to expect millions of tourists to know the relevant international, national or local ivory regulations. It would also be challenging, if not impossible, for the Tokyo Metropolitan Police and other enforcement authorities to have the resources to patrol every single ivory transaction online and in stores across Japan during the Olympics time.

Japan is among the most trusted allies of the United States and a leader in global affairs. We urge Japan to close its domestic market – a historic milestone in wildlife conservation.

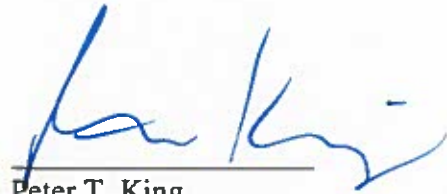
Together we can end the trade in ivory to ensure a promising future for the survival of elephants for our and future generations.

⁴ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/tracking-ivory/article.html>

Respectfully,



Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Peter T. King
Member of Congress



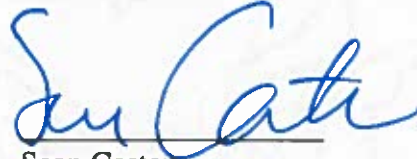
Cindy Axne
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Ed Case
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



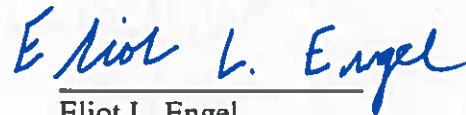
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



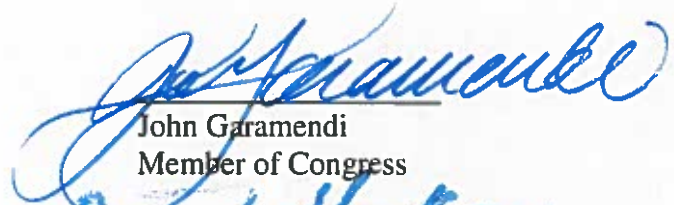
Suzan R. DelBene
Member of Congress



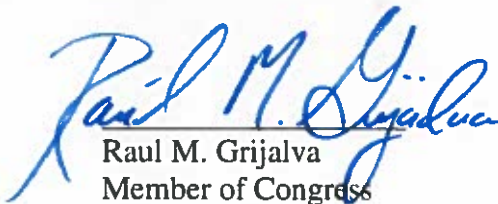
Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



John Garamendi
Member of Congress



Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



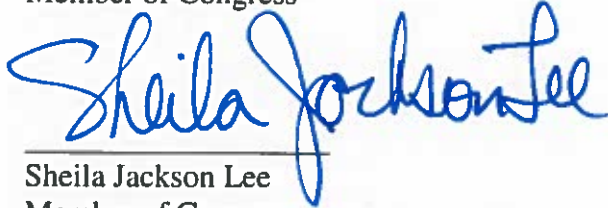
Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress



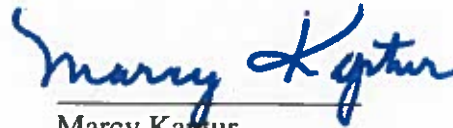
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
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Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



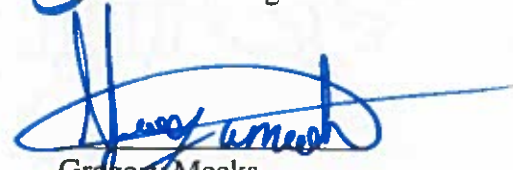
Ted Lieu
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
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Ann McLane Kuster
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Gregory Meeks
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Gwen Moore
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Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
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Frank Pallone, Jr.
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Tim Ryan
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Jan Schakowsky
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Darren Soto
Member of Congress



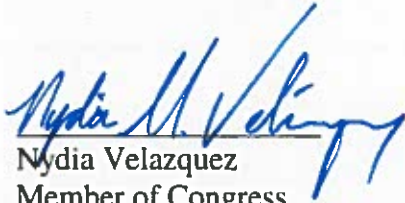
Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson
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Dina Titus
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Nydia Velázquez
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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CC:

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe
Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Kono
Minister of Environment Yoshiaki
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