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Toronto City Council

19th November 2012

Dear Councillors,

I am writing this letter as an expert on animal welfare and as Chair of the Toronto Zoo Animal Care and Research Committee (ACARC). I have been a member of this Committee for 10 years and have been Chair for just over a year.

In my opinion, the decision by Toronto City Council to send the three elephants, Thika, Toka and Iringa to the PAWS Sanctuary in northern California is not in the animals' best interests. I think that everyone, including ACARC, agrees that, in order to ensure their welfare, these aging elephants should be moved. The facilities at Toronto Zoo no longer meet their requirements particularly during the winter months. However, I firmly believe that the decision by Council to send the elephants to the PAWS Sanctuary is misguided. I base my belief on three pieces of evidence:

1. There is overwhelming evidence that there is active tuberculosis infection amongst the elephants recently and currently at the PAWS Sanctuary. In my opinion, it is completely unethical to send animals which are free from tuberculosis, and are known to have been free from tuberculosis since they were brought to Toronto Zoo many years ago, to a facility where that infection is known to exist. The fact that the Toronto Zoo elephants have not been exposed to tuberculosis means that they will be very susceptible to the infection and are likely to become very ill.

The fact that no elephants at PAWS have *died* from tuberculosis is irrelevant to the argument; several elephants have been culled at PAWS that have been shown at *post mortem* examination to be infected with tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a debilitating illness that causes suffering and really reduces welfare. No animal should be exposed to it if alternative arrangements can be made.

These remarks should not be seen as a criticism of the PAWS Sanctuary. From pictures and television clips that I have seen of PAWS, it looks like a very nice retirement home for elephants. I think it is wonderful that such a Sanctuary exists – a Sanctuary that will accept abused and injured elephants and elephants suffering from tuberculosis. However, I strongly believe that it is not an appropriate sanctuary for the Toronto Zoo elephants because they are known to be free from tuberculosis.

2. Transporting three elephants from Toronto Zoo to the PAWS Sanctuary in northern California is a huge problem and poses a very real risk to their survival. By road, this journey of about 4,300 km will take four days to complete. In my opinion, it is doubtful if Thika, Toka and Iringa would survive such a stressful journey. Two of the elephants are already trained to enter a crate while the third elephant is two-thirds trained (awaiting a final crate modification). However, it will take very little to disrupt this training. Thus, once crated, the journey to the final destination must be completed. The journey cannot be broken to allow the elephants out of the crates to exercise, feed and drink, and rest; there is a big risk that they would not enter the crates again. These are wild animals, not trained circus elephants that can be manipulated at will. It is unknown if the Toronto elephants will eat and drink during a long road journey. If they do not, they will not have the stamina to survive.

This leaves air transport as the only alternative means of getting the elephants to PAWS. To my knowledge, a plane with proper pressure and temperature control that would be capable of air-lifting three elephants has not yet been identified.

3. Although the winter climate at the PAWS Sanctuary is much milder than at the Toronto Zoo, it is not ideal for elephants. There are still many days and nights through the winter when the temperature falls to and below 0°C. This means that the elephants at PAWS spend a considerable amount of time indoors. Although the floors of the barns have a thick rubberized coating and are heated, there is no indoor enrichment for the elephants.

For all these reasons given above, I recommend strongly that the Toronto Zoo elephants should not go to the PAWS Sanctuary in northern California and that the decision on their final home should be left to the Toronto Zoo staff.

There is a new sanctuary currently being built in Florida which will be AZA accredited and which looks very promising as a retirement home for the Toronto elephants. It will be free from tuberculosis, will have an ideal climate for elephants and will be reachable in 22 hours by road from Toronto. This will still be a stressful journey for the elephants but one which they should survive.

Yours sincerely,

Ian J.H. Duncan
Professor Emeritus
Emeritus Chair in Animal Welfare