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November 21, 2011

Joe Torzsok, Chair, Toronto Zoo Board of Management  
Paul Ainslie, Vice Chair, Toronto Zoo Board of Management  
Toronto Zoo  
361A Old Finch Avenue  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M1B 5K7

Dear Members of the Toronto Zoo Board of Management:

I write in follow up to our letter dated May 10, 2011 (attached), in which the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) cautioned against a decision to move the Toronto Zoo elephants to a non-AZA-accredited facility based on a number of concerns. At that time, the Board of Management made the decision to allow the Toronto Zoo to engage in a thoughtful evaluation of possible locations, with a strong preference for an AZA-accredited facility.

We write now to urge you to allow the process you set in motion in May to continue and for the animal care experts at the Toronto Zoo to come to a decision based on that deliberative process. Regardless of the action taken by the Toronto City Council, the Toronto Zoo Board of Management is the governing authority for the Toronto Zoo. As such, we call on you to uphold the AZA Accreditation Standards and the AZA Code of Professional Ethics by asking the City Council to reverse its decision (MM 13.9) and to allow the Zoo's decision-making process to continue.

AZA Standards speak to issues of governance, the appropriate disposition of animals in the Zoo's collection, and the adherence to Species Survival Plan recommendations. We cannot predict possible actions that might be taken by AZA's independent Accreditation Commission in this case, and those deliberations will be affected by the actions of the Board of Management at its upcoming hearing and by the subsequent response provided to the Commission. However, the course of action set forth by the City Council appears to be at odds with the Accreditation Standards and Code of Professional Ethics. If the professional experts at a zoo do not have control over animal management decisions, it undercuts adherence to all of the other Accreditation Standards that are so vital to animal care and welfare.

Maintaining AZA Accreditation has significant benefits to the Toronto Zoo. The Toronto Zoo participates in the management of more than 100 species through the AZA Species Survival Plan Program, a vital collaboration among AZA-accredited institutions. Of the animals at the Toronto Zoo, approximately 175 are on loan from other AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums. Many of these loan agreements are contingent upon the Toronto Zoo remaining accredited by AZA.

The decision by the City Council that ownership of the Zoo's elephants should be transferred to an unaccredited facility is troubling. Many AZA-accredited institutions prefer to loan animals (even to each other) rather than transfer ownership, so they can regularly assure themselves that their animals are receiving high-quality care. Elephants are long lived animals, but once ownership is relinquished, the Zoo and the people of Toronto will have no say, ever again, in how its elephants are treated.

AZA Accreditation Standards recognize that animals must be cared for over a long period of time. That is why the Standards require that an institution maintain adequate financial reserves. Unaccredited facilities, that may appear to provide adequate care now, may not be able to do so in the future.

In fact, there are no concerns that the Board of Management or the City Council have expressed that were not already being addressed through the Zoo's evaluation process – climate, social grouping, quality of care – and all of these conditions can be addressed by a number of AZA-accredited facilities.

We want our grandparents to be in accredited nursing homes, we want our children to attend accredited universities, and when we fall ill, we want to be treated in an accredited hospital. The Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation and Accreditation Canada have serious, meaningful accreditation processes that truly improves outcomes for patients. In the context of a zoological institution, the AZA accreditation process is just as meaningful. Those who are dismissive of AZA Accreditation are exhibiting a disregard for the care and welfare of the animals no less than those who would disregard the accreditation of Canadian healthcare facilities.

The Toronto Zoo's elephants deserve access to the extensive network of scientific advisors afforded by the AZA Elephant Taxonomic Advisory Group/Species Survival Plan. These experts cover the disciplines of nutrition, veterinary medicine, pathology, behavior, reproduction, population management, and research. The elephant care professionals at AZA-accredited zoos are the experts on the health and welfare of elephants and AZA-accredited facilities offer the best assurance that the Toronto Zoo elephants will always receive the highest level of care.

Again, we urge the Toronto Zoo Board of Management to formally request that the City Council reconsider and rescind its Motion MM 13.9. Thank you for your continued support for the AZA-accredited Toronto Zoo.

Regards,

Jim Maddy  
President and CEO

cc: Dela Ting, Secretariat to the Toronto Zoo Board of Management  
John Tracogna, Chief Executive Office, Toronto Zoo  
L. Patricia Simmons, Chair, AZA Board of Directors  
Bill Peters, National Director, Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Attachment: May 10, 2011 AZA Letter to Toronto Zoo Board of Management





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May 10, 2011

Toronto Zoo Board of Management  
2nd floor, West Tower, City Hall  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Members of the Board:

I write in support of the Toronto Zoo, an institution accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). As the Zoo plans for its future, I offer the support and expertise of AZA.

AZA Accreditation Standards are science-based and always rising, including its mandatory standards for the care and welfare of elephants. AZA's *Standards for Elephant Management and Care* require a significant commitment of staff and resources to appropriately maintain these magnificent animals. The Toronto Zoo is currently meeting these Standards, and the process in which you are engaged will assure that it does so in the future.

AZA recognizes that the Toronto Zoo Board of Management's decision will be informed by a review of respected, commissioned research that takes into account all relevant factors, including the AZA Accreditation Standards and the collaborative work of the AZA African Elephant Species Survival Plan, which always seeks to maximize the care and welfare of the North American African elephant population. With these key factors in mind, if the Board decided to move the Toronto Zoo's elephants to another facility, the only way to assure that these elephants receive the highest level of care is to send them to an AZA-accredited facility.

With more than 3,880 years of collective elephant management experience and an extensive network of scientific advisors covering the disciplines of nutrition, veterinary medicine, pathology, behavior, reproduction, population management, education, and research, the elephant care professionals at AZA-accredited zoos are the trusted experts on the health and welfare of elephants. By going to an AZA-accredited facility, the elephants from Toronto would continue to have access to this important network of elephant care experts.

In contrast, Non-accredited zoos and private elephant facilities (so-called sanctuaries) are not an appropriate alternative. These are places where elephants live with assistance from people who provide food, water and shelter but are not required to meet the rigorous AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care. It is a common misconception that private elephant facilities provide "freedom". While they can provide larger acreage than some zoological facilities, the management of all North American elephants requires extensive use of barriers and fencing. In addition, some of these non-accredited facilities have struggled with the management of disease.

AZA-accredited zoos that care for elephants differ from non-accredited zoos and private elephant facilities in several important ways:

- AZA-accredited zoos are open to the public and are committed to helping people learn about elephants, the conservation issues threatening them, and the ways in which people can take action to protect them. Private elephant facilities are just that, private, and generally closed to everyone except wealthy high-dollar donors.
- AZA-accredited zoos provide extensive support to a variety of international conservation and research programs that help elephants in Africa and Asia.
- AZA-accredited zoos have carefully planned elephant breeding programs, which not only help build the North American herd, but also provide scientific knowledge to assist populations in Africa and Asia.

We are confident that the professionals at the Toronto Zoo, serving as trusted experts in animal care, are working and will continue to work in the best interests of the elephants and the millions of people who love these majestic creatures.

We are proud that Toronto Zoo is part of the AZA's network of global conservation leadership, which supports more than 3,700 conservation projects, with \$90 million annually, in more than 100 countries. A 2005 Harris poll found that 86% percent of respondents agreed that visiting a zoo or aquarium encourages people to donate money or time to conservation programs that help protect animals.

Because of its commitment to pursuing the highest standards of animal care and welfare and in recognition of its role as a conservation leader, the Toronto Zoo has the support of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

Sincerely,

Kristin L. Vehrs  
Executive Director