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November 18, 2011

To the Mayor and Members of Council, City of Toronto and Toronto Zoo Board of Management,

I am writing to you today to express my appreciation and support for the City of Toronto's decision to send the Toronto Zoo's three elephants, Toka, Thika and Iringa, to the PAWS sanctuary in California.

I understand several people have expressed concern that Toronto's elephants will be placed in a sanctuary, instead of a zoo. While many zoos do an excellent job of caring for wild animals and contributing to their conservation, there are some species, like elephants, which will always be unsuited to zoo environments.

With their intense social bonds and need for large areas to roam, elephants should remain in the wild or when this is not possible, in a sanctuary that can provide them with adequate care, the chance to form natural bonds with other elephants, and large areas of natural habitat.

As someone who has visited a wide variety of sanctuaries throughout the world, I can assure you that many offer the highest standard of housing and care possible. The Jane Goodall Institute's own Tchimpounga Sanctuary in the Republic of Congo is one example, but there are many others.

My colleagues, elephant biologists Cynthia Moss and Joyce Poole, who rank among the leading elephant experts in the world, have visited the PAWS sanctuary and call its elephant housing and care exemplary, among the best found anywhere. Perhaps more importantly, they say that the elephants at PAWS actually act like their wild counterparts, something that is very rare in captivity.

Toronto City Council has shown great compassion and leadership in this decision. I believe you have made the right choice for Toronto's elephants and I sincerely hope you have an opportunity to see the elephants after they've had a chance to settle into the PAWS sanctuary. I have no doubt the experience will change them for the better.

Dr. Jane Goodall, D.B.E.

Founder of the Jane Goodall Institute and UN Messenger of Peace