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Embracing measures for the protection of wildlife
and conservation of wild habitats in Kenya.

Monday, 30 June 2014

Dear Metro Council President Tom Hughes and Portland Metro Councilors,

The plight of Packy, an elephant in the Oregon Zoo has been brought to my notice, and since I am recognized as an authority on elephants, having hand-reared over 150 from early infancy, I feel qualified to offer some advice. All the orphans that I have hand-reared during 50 years of my life, when full grown, have been successfully returned back where they rightly belong, amongst the wild herds of a Protected Area large enough to offer an elephant a quality of life in terms of space and companionship. Many of our ex-orphans are now having wild-born young in Kenya's Tsavo National Park (the size of Michigan State) and bringing them back to show their Keepers, i.e. the human family that replaced their lost elephant one in early infancy and who were with them until such time as they ultimately made the transition back into the wild community. Because of such a long and intimate involvement with elephants, may I make a plea for Packy and suggest that as a good will gesture, the authorities release him to a reputable sanctuary.

Most good European Zoos have long understood that elephants should not be confined in captivity, that it is cruel to do so and that there is nothing educational about ogling a miserable captive. They no longer keep elephants as exhibits. As a World Leader, America should surely follow suit, especially in this, the 21st Century. May I therefore plead for the release of Packy in Oregon Zoo; that he be sent to a reputable Sanctuary where he will have more space. No artificial situation, however attractive it may appear to us human onlookers, can possibly afford a captive elephant the space it needs. One hundred miles in a day is just a stroll for an elephant. (Our 10 year old orphan did it in a day, turned around and walked 120 miles the next day.) Elephants cross International Boundaries, and before humans were on the planet undoubtedly walked from the Cape to Cairo. They are like us. They suffer from trauma and stress, and because of this die younger in captivity. Perhaps Oregon Zoo will extend compassion by releasing this elephant and affording it a little happiness. I do hope so.

It has been scientifically established that elephants are "human" in terms of emotion, something that I can wholeheartedly endorse through 50 years of practical experience. They have the same strong sense of family and of death; they have friendships that span a lifetime, and being gregarious, like humans, they need each other, and the companionship and comfort that friendship generates. Consider this the worst punishment we inflict on our own human wrong-doers is solitary confinement and life imprisonment.



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Is it therefore right to inflict this extremely severe punishment on an innocent animal that duplicates us humans in terms of emotion, longevity and age progression and moreover has a memory that far surpasses our own? Captive breeding programmes only serve perpetuate this cruelty inflicted on elephants for further generations to come, and in my opinion, does not help wild populations. I would therefore request also that you cease involvement in the captive breeding business, which only serves to bring young elephants into a life of confinement and imprisonment for human enjoyment.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Dame Daphne Sheldrick DBE MBE MBS DVMS
Chairperson, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Kenya.

UNEP Global 500 Laureate' Winner of the BBC Lifetime Achievement Award