



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

December 16, 2009

Mr. Norton N. Bonaparte, Jr.
City Manager & CEO
City of Topeka
215 SE 7th Street, Room 352
Topeka, KS 66603-3914

Via Fax: 785-368-3909

Dear Mr. Bonaparte:

In Defense of Animals (IDA) is an international animal protection organization representing more than 85,000 supporters. We have been closely following the disturbing revelations of animal deaths at the Topeka Zoo, and appreciate your efforts to thoroughly investigate the matter. Following recent key personnel changes, the Zoo now has the opportunity to make a fresh start and ensure that the animals' welfare always comes first. However, this cannot be entirely accomplished as long as the Zoo continues to display the elephants, Tembo and Sunda, in inadequate conditions that fail to meet their needs. Therefore, IDA urges the City to close the elephant exhibit and instead use the vast resources required for elephant care to improve the lives of many more animals at the Zoo.

Elephants are perhaps the most difficult, and expensive, of all species to accommodate in a captive setting for a variety of reasons including: huge size; need for vast space for walking and continuous activity (elephants naturally walk tens of miles a day and are active for 20 out of 24 hours); complex social requirements (elephants live in large family groups, though relationships can extend to hundred of individuals); and long life spans (roughly equivalent to humans at 60-70 years). Because zoos generally lack the space and natural environment elephants need, they require intensive "maintenance," including foot and skin care.

These challenges have led 18 major zoos to close, plan to close or phase out their elephant exhibits. These include major urban zoos in Detroit, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and other cities.

Unfortunately, the Topeka Zoo does not provide the space, natural conditions or climate that Tembo and Sunda need to thrive. The elephants share only three-quarters of an acre outdoors and a fraction of that space indoors, where they are restricted to tiny stalls for much of their lives. Topeka's long, frigid winters exacerbate the problem by forcing these tropical animals to spend the majority of their time inside, where they cannot adequately exercise.

Lack of space for movement and hard surfaces, such as concrete, are recognized by experts as the cause of often-lethal foot and joint disorders in captive-held elephants. Topeka Zoo records indicate that both elephants suffer chronic foot conditions, and Sunda shows "deterioration of digits" (bones) in one front foot. She also exhibits abnormal repetitive rocking, which the records indicate may contribute to her foot problems. Foot and joint disease are the leading reasons for euthanizing elephants in captivity.

Foot and joint disorders are directly related to inadequate zoo conditions; they are not problems of care that can be rectified by changes in personnel or training. As you are aware, the USDA cited the Zoo in 2005 for failure to provide adequate foot care for the elephants. Despite the fact that improvements were made and foot care is now regularly provided, the problems persist because the elephants remain in the same inadequate conditions.

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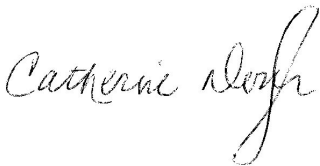
The Topeka Zoo also fails to provide adequate social opportunities for Tembo and Sunda, one of whom is African and the other Asian, denying them the ability to live with others of their own kind. The abundant scientific literature available on elephants supports keeping conspecifics (members of the same species) together, as cited by experts in *Best Practices by the Coalition for Captive Elephant Well-Being* (Kane, et al, 2005). This finding is confirmed by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), which recommends against keeping the two species together due to behavioral differences that “may lead to problems with dominance and aggression” (*AZA Standards for Elephant Management and Care*). In fact, Zoo records show that the elephants have a history of aggression toward one another and have suffered injuries from attacks. For example, in April 2008 Sunda hit Tembo several times. The records state: “Both incidents she hit Tembo hard enough to slide her several feet. A short time later, noticed Tembo acting stiff on FL [front left] leg.” Tembo can also show dominance toward Sunda, according to the records.

IDA urges you to seriously consider the information contained in this letter and take steps to close the Topeka Zoo elephant exhibit. We encourage you to send Tembo and Sunda to a facility that would better meet their needs, such as an elephant sanctuary. There are two sanctuaries, located in Tennessee and California, which provide spacious natural environments where elephants have year-round access to a complex and varied habitat, social companions, and high quality daily and veterinary care. To date, 11 zoos have sent 15 elephants to sanctuaries.

By taking this progressive and compassionate action for Tembo and Sunda, you will enormously increase their quality of life and free up more resources that can be used to improve the lives of other animals at the Topeka Zoo. It will also help restore public confidence in the Zoo by showing that animal welfare truly is a priority.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I would appreciate a response from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Doyle". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Catherine Doyle
Specialist – Captive Elephant Welfare

Cc: Mayor William W. Bunten
Topeka City Council