



December 29, 2020

His Excellency K.P. Sharma Oli  
Rt. Hon'ble Prime Minister of Nepal

Your Excellency:

In light of the cancellation of the Chitwan Elephant Festival, I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Asia and our more than 3.5 million members and supporters worldwide to ask for a permanent end to this event. Elephants suffer tremendously during this festival.

The only way to control these huge animals and force them to engage in atypical behavior is through violence and domination. During the last two events, PETA Asia documented that *mahouts* repeatedly beat elephants in order to force them to "play" polo and football. The ban on sharp bullhooks during matches is meaningless since the handlers beat the animals with sticks and violently yank their ears. Even when off the field, elephants are still relentlessly and mercilessly jabbed with bullhooks.

Thanks to decades of research, we know that elephants are highly social animals who live in matriarchal herds, protect one another, forage for fresh vegetation, play, bathe in rivers, and share mothering responsibilities for the herds' babies. Just like us, they feel pain, sorrow, and joy.

After learning about the cruelty, some sponsors have pulled their support of the festival and some businesses have stopped promoting it. It's clear that there is growing opposition to using elephants as entertainment props.

Moving forward, ethical tourism could bolster the rebound of Nepal's flagging tourism industry. The municipalities that sponsor the Chitwan Elephant Festival could attract tourists by investing in a sanctuary where elephants could retire and *mahouts* could maintain employment. Animal sanctuaries elsewhere have been extremely successful. For example, the Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary in Thailand has a long waiting list for anyone wanting to visit. People pay to watch elephants there at a safe distance—the animals don't give rides and aren't forced to play unnatural games, and visitors aren't allowed to feed them.

Such a plan could complement the "Visit Sauraha" campaign being launched by the Ratnanagar Municipality and other stakeholders. This is a unique opportunity to take a meaningful stand for these threatened animals, now and in the future.

May I please hear that you'll seriously consider permanently ending the Chitwan Elephant Festival? Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

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