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His Majesty, Norodom Sihamoni
King of Cambodia
Royal Palace
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Re: Exploitation of Primates in Cambodia and possible collaboration.

Your Majesty, King Norodom Sihamoni,

My name is Ian Oberem, and I am reaching out to you today with a heavy heart, deeply troubled by a matter that has recently come to my attention. This pressing issue not only impacts the innocent creatures residing within the borders of your cherished nation of Cambodia but also strikes at the very core of your country's integrity. As an ordinary global citizen with no affiliations to wildlife organizations or similar entities, I am compelled to speak out and offer my assistance in addressing this grave concern. My motivation stems solely from a profound sense of empathy and responsibility towards the welfare of all living beings, regardless of borders or affiliations. It is my fervent belief that by joining forces and working collaboratively, we can make meaningful strides towards resolving this issue and safeguarding the well-being of Cambodia's precious wildlife.

Your Excellency, I humbly extend my hand in solidarity and stand ready to support your country in any way possible to address this pressing matter.

Before highlighting the matter, may I refer to your inaugural public address. As the esteemed Monarch of Cambodia, your profound commitment to the welfare of your people and the transparency of the Royal House resonates deeply. Your

words, echoing the wisdom imparted by your august father, emphasize the importance of remaining in touch with the realities of the nation to serve, defend, and develop Cambodia and its people. Your pledge to always be a faithful and devoted servant to your beloved compatriots, eschewing the seclusion of an ivory tower, embodies a spirit of humility and dedication that inspires us all. Your Majesty, as you expressed your unwavering dedication to the well-being of your people, I am compelled to draw attention to a pressing issue that demands collective action.

Let me now address the issue at hand.

It has recently come to my attention that a deeply concerning trend is emerging on various social media platforms, particularly within the borders of Cambodia. Disturbingly, individuals are increasingly exploiting and subjecting innocent monkeys to abuse for the sake of financial gain.

While it is undeniable that many individuals may resort to such actions due to economic hardships, it is imperative to recognize that these activities far exceed the boundaries of acceptability. The egregious acts of cruelty inflicted upon these defenceless creatures not only result in immense suffering but also cast a shadow over Cambodia's reputation as a compassionate and just society. The exploitation of animals for monetary profit not only violates ethical principles but also undermines the values of empathy and decency that are essential for a harmonious and humane society. It is crucial to address these issues promptly and decisively to safeguard the welfare of both animals and the integrity of Cambodia as a nation.

As a deeply concerned individual committed to upholding the welfare of animals and preserving the integrity of Cambodia and other Asian countries, I am steadfast in my resolve to address the egregious issue of primate exploitation and abuse within your borders. In taking proactive steps, I am fully prepared to lead the establishment and helm the leadership of a specialized task force dedicated to confronting this pressing concern head-on. This task force will be meticulously crafted to identify and bring to justice those individuals culpable of perpetrating acts of cruelty against innocent monkeys. By rooting out these perpetrators and ensuring they are held accountable for their reprehensible actions, we can send an unequivocal message that such abhorrent behavior will

not be tolerated within the confines of Cambodia. Furthermore, once the task force is established and operational, with tangible results achieved, the baton of management can be judiciously passed on to a well-appointed Cambodian official, ensuring the sustained efficacy and continuity of efforts to combat primate exploitation in your nation.

Ensuring that comprehensive and robust laws are in place is crucial in effectively combating these despicable acts of primate exploitation and abuse. It is vital that Cambodia's legal framework includes provisions enabling the imposition of the harshest penalties on individuals involved in such cruel activities at all times. This necessitates a thorough review and potential enhancement of existing legislation to adequately address the severity of crimes committed against innocent animals. In the subsequent sections of this letter, I will delve into specific recommendations for appropriate punishments, aiming to strengthen the legal tools available to authorities for prosecuting and deterring those engaged in primate exploitation. By reinforcing your legal framework, we can uphold justice and protect the welfare of your animal companions, sending a clear message that such reprehensible acts will face the full force of the law. Your support for this endeavor is paramount, as it will enable and force your Government to implement the necessary measures to uphold these laws effectively.

I am sure that the recent indictment charges of two Cambodian government officials involved in the trafficking of monkeys, sent shockwaves through your nation. The revelation of individuals entrusted with public responsibility engaging in such illicit activities has shaken global trust in Cambodia as a country and raised concerns about the integrity of government institutions. This egregious act not only undermines conservation efforts aimed at protecting Cambodia's rich biodiversity but also highlights the pervasive nature of wildlife trafficking and the urgent need for stricter enforcement measures. The arrests serve as a stark reminder of the importance of combating corruption and holding individuals, regardless of their position or influence, accountable for their actions. According to allegations of the indictment, long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*), sometimes known as crab-eating macaques, are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and require special permits in order to be imported into

the U.S. Such documents enable the Convention parties to monitor the effects of the volume and type of trade to ensure trade is legal and not detrimental to the survival of listed species. The long-tailed macaque has been regulated under CITES since 1977.

The indictment further alleges that James Lau and Dickson Lau, operating from Hong Kong, owned and managed a series of related corporations that conspired with black market collectors and corrupt officials in Cambodia to acquire wild-caught macaques and launder them through the Cambodian entities for export to the U.S. and elsewhere, falsely labelled as captive bred.

It is imperative that swift and decisive action be taken to prosecute those responsible and prevent further exploitation of Cambodia's natural resources. This incident underscores the necessity for continuous vigilance and collaborative efforts to safeguard the country's precious wildlife and uphold the rule of law. Although I am uncertain about the actions taken by your Government in 2022 against these individuals, I am hopeful that they were met with severe consequences.

Now, let's turn our attention to the punishment that should or could be meted out.

In societies where appropriate punishment is lacking, associated behaviors such as animal abuse tend to occur more frequently. Implementing suitable penalties for repeat offenders who engage in abusive behavior towards primates in Cambodia is vital not only to protect these animals but also to send a resolute message to both citizens and the global community about Cambodia's commitment to combating animal cruelty.

- Jail time under less-than-ideal conditions for repeat offenders can serve as a stark deterrent, accompanied by measures to ensure perpetrators understand the severity of their actions.
- Community service, particularly in areas where primates reside, can be a constructive form of punishment while also contributing to animal welfare.
- To prevent further breaches, it is imperative to implement enhanced security measures. These measures include conducting thorough personal searches of video operators to intercept items such as drugs, which are sometimes administered to primates to elicit specific behaviors for

recording and sharing on social media. Additionally, weapons used to shoot rocks or intimidate the primates must be confiscated.

- Furthermore, increasing foot patrols at temple sites and parks is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of these animals.
- Door to door patrols could also be implemented in areas where it is known that primates, especially those of endangered species are found.
- For serious offenses like murder and sexual abuse of primates, stricter penalties such as investigating living conditions and imposing hefty fines or bans from interacting with animals should be considered.
- Coupled with educational initiatives, these measures aim to foster a culture of compassion and respect for animal welfare in Cambodia.
- Individuals convicted of these crimes, particularly in cases involving the murder and abuse of primates, should undergo thorough investigations into their family social structures. In situations where there is evidence of abuse or neglect, appropriate measures should be taken, including the possibility of removing children from such environments to ensure their safety and well-being.

I am also confident that there are numerous international wildlife organizations eager to lend their support to this cause. These organizations can provide essential financial assistance for various aspects of the initiative, including the hiring of additional law enforcement personnel, as well as resources for the rehabilitation and care of rescued monkeys. Moreover, with their support, we can ensure that the perpetrators of these horrific crimes face the harshest of sentences, including life imprisonment, for their abuse and senseless murder of these defenceless animals.

Together, with the combined efforts of domestic and international stakeholders, we can ensure that justice is served and that the rights of all animals within Cambodia are protected. By taking decisive action against animal cruelty, we not only uphold the values of compassion and empathy that define our nation but also pave the way for a brighter future for both humans and animals alike.

In light of the limited political powers vested in Your Majesty and the steadfast adherence to the role of a constitutional monarch, it is imperative to recognize that the issue at hand transcends political boundaries. The welfare and

protection of innocent creatures within Cambodia should not be entangled in political discourse but rather approached with a collective sense of responsibility and compassion. As His Majesty is widely regarded as 'above politics', it underscores the importance of addressing this matter through avenues that prioritize ethical considerations and the well-being of all beings, irrespective of political affiliations. By steering away from political entanglements, we can foster a united front dedicated to safeguarding the integrity of Cambodia's natural heritage and upholding the values of compassion and stewardship.

Your esteemed position as a revered figure in Cambodia renders your support and guidance paramount in addressing the troubling issue of primate abuse within your nation. With your unique ability to direct concerns to the appropriate avenues, including governmental bodies and conservation organizations, Your Majesty's involvement would undoubtedly catalyze efforts towards eradicating this pressing concern. By lending your influential voice to this cause, you can galvanize stakeholders at all levels to prioritize the welfare and protection of innocent creatures within Cambodia, ensuring a concerted and effective response to this urgent matter. With Your Majesty's support, we can pave the way for meaningful change and uphold the principles of compassion and justice for all beings.

By addressing this matter with the same sincerity and commitment to transparency that you have exhibited, we can work together to ensure the protection and dignity of all beings within Cambodia. Your leadership serves as a beacon of hope, guiding us towards a future where compassion and justice prevail and I humbly urge Your Excellency to consider my proposal and to support our concerted efforts to combat animal cruelty in Cambodia. Your leadership and endorsement of this initiative will undoubtedly serve as a powerful catalyst for change.

For the record, I sent the Cambodian Ministry of Environment a letter of similar content on 11 December 2023 via their Facebook official page. I received a reply "thank you" on the same day but have since heard nothing nor have I been asked to assist in any way. It is my intension, as explained in that letter, to establish a sanctuary for these exploited and endangered primates here in South Africa.

Your Majesty, I thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and I eagerly await your response and stand ready to assist in any way possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ian' with a stylized flourish above the 'n'.

IAN P OBEREM