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**Testimony Before the Virginia Senate Courts of Justice Committee
In Support of S.B. 1215, A Bill to Restrict the Sale of Ivory and Rhinoceros Horn in Virginia**

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Born Free USA, a national nonprofit animal advocacy and wildlife conservation organization, strongly supports Senator Adam Ebbin's bill, S.B. 1215, to prohibit the sale of elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn in Virginia. Born Free USA staff have studied wildlife trafficking for more than two decades and we can now conclude that the elephant poaching epidemic across Africa has reached crisis levels in recent years and rhino poaching is escalating exponentially. As the second largest ivory market in the world, the United States bears a significant responsibility to act now.

Current Circumstances of the Ivory Trade

The elephant poaching crisis has now reached all-time highs, with an estimated 35,000 to 50,000 elephants slaughtered per year. In fact, the website www.bloodyivory.org, specifically quantifies more than 103,000 elephants slaughtered by poachers since 2012. As a result, certain populations of African elephants are vulnerable to extinction and may not withstand these poaching thresholds much longer. And, when these elephants disappear, if ivory markets are not eliminated, demand will lead poaching operations further east and south, decimating other African elephant populations.

In recent years, it has been revealed that dangerous criminal syndicates and organized terrorist gangs engage in elephant poaching to acquire ivory, which they sell for arms to ply their deadly activities. Born Free USA, seeking an accurate and complete picture of the depths of this nefarious activity, commissioned expert defense analysts to examine the military, national security, and localized conflict aspects to reveal, in detail, the threats to elephants across Africa. Their findings were compiled into our report *Ivory's Curse*, and the conclusions are truly alarming. Criminal networks such as Janjaweed and the Lord's Resistance Army use profits from wildlife trafficking to purchase weapons and fund their

brutal operations. A second report, *Out of Africa*, identified shipping routes and the means by which ivory is extracted from poached elephants, transported to consolidation points, and bundled for shipment overseas by organized criminal syndicates.

As long as there is a market for ivory – including right here in Virginia – and poaching continues unfettered, these ruthless terrorist organizations and corrupt individuals and entities will continue to bring chaos, bloodshed, and insecurity to the region.

Current Circumstances of the Rhinoceros Horn Trade

All five rhino species are in tremendous danger due to the demand for their horns. The horns, made of a substance akin to human fingernails, are used in Traditional Asian Medicine to allegedly cure a variety of ailments including cancer, despite conclusive evidence that they have no curative properties.

Africa's black rhinos are critically endangered, with a population of fewer than 5,000. South Africa, which is home to the majority of African rhinos, has seen a staggering increase in poaching numbers in recent years – from a handful in 2007 to 333 in 2010 to more than 1,000 in 2013 and more than 1,000 again in 2014.

The harsh reality of the international wildlife trade is that there are, even as we speak, poachers crossing from Mozambique into South Africa to slaughter Africa's imperiled wildlife – and that some of these illegal wildlife products could ultimately end up in the Virginia marketplace masquerading as legal items.

Solutions

Born Free USA believes it is the responsibility of the United States Congress and individual state legislatures do everything in their power to stop the slaughter of elephants and rhinos in Africa. To this end, it is imperative to completely ban the commercialization of ivory and rhino horn – no loopholes. If we want to end the market for ivory in Virginia, there can't be any room for illegal wildlife products to be sold as legal products. It is unfortunately far too easy for documents to be forged and ivory disguised as antique. Similar legislation that passed last year in New York and New Jersey demonstrated widespread

enthusiasm for the issue among citizens, and these laws have proven effective for law enforcement in the past several months.

There is no economic, cultural, conservation, or other justification for selling elephant ivory or rhino horn in Virginia or anywhere else in the United States in 2015. I sincerely hope that the Senate Courts of Justice Committee votes in favor of this crucial piece of legislation. S.B. 1215 could represent part of a shift in the way the states of this nation deal with the wildlife trade, and help to bring much-needed relief to the ravaged elephant and rhino populations of the world.

Thank you for your consideration.