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## CELEBRITIES & CAMPAIGNERS DEMAND HALT TO NEW ELEPHANT HUNTING PLAN

### **Conservationists, stars and MPs are demanding a halt to plans to allow trophy hunters to legally kill what they say is the world's most important elephant population.**

Their call marks the launch of a new global campaign to make trophy hunting illegal.

Campaigners say that plans to hunt elephants in Botswana could push the species further towards extinction. The country has the world's largest population of African elephants – twice as many as any other nation – thanks to a hunting ban.

However the new President, who came into power in April 2018, has said he wants to lift the ban.

An open letter from celebrities and conservationists to be delivered to the Botswana High Commissioner in London condemns the proposals. It has been signed by Bill Bailey, Nicky Campbell, Peter Egan, Ranulph Fiennes, Stephen Fry, Ricky Gervais, Joanna Lumley, Virginia McKenna, Bill Oddie, Chris Packham, Sara Pascoe and Carol Royle. It states:

“The population of elephants has plummeted in recent years, with trophy hunting and ivory poaching largely to blame. Today, one third of all African elephants in the wild are found in Botswana.

“With its population dwindling and increasingly scattered, the impact of trophy hunting could be disastrous and possibly contribute to the extinction of the species. This would be a major global conservation disaster – potentially the worst in living memory – and have tremendously damaging consequences for efforts to conserve endangered fauna and flora everywhere.”

Eduardo Goncalves, founder of the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting and author of a 250,000-strong Care2 petition protesting the plans to bring back elephant trophy hunting in Botswana, said an international treaty was needed to ban the bloodsport in order to protect elephants and other vulnerable wildlife:

“Trophy hunting is cruel and inhumane. Large animals such as elephants suffer lingering and painful deaths after being shot. Trophy hunting is putting pressure on already-threatened species such as elephants, lions and rhinos, and may contribute to us losing them altogether. Trophy hunting needs to be banned now, before it's too late.”

In a statement, Joanna Lumley said: “I have always considered trophy hunting the lowest of the low. Killing animals for fun is just disgusting. We are urging President Masisi to reject the proposal to lift the ban on trophy hunting for the sake of the elephants in his beautiful country and for the reputation of humans everywhere.”

Ricky Gervais also hit out strongly against the moves: “If trophy hunting elephants in Botswana is made legal again, we might as well say goodbye to them now. It will be the end for African elephants, and all because some rich psychopath enjoys murdering a magnificent animal”.

Damian Aspinall added: “As a conservationist and as someone directly involved in working to save persecuted species, I can say from first-hand experience that hunting for ‘sport’ is putting tremendous pressure on our wildlife. Trophy hunting is simply inexplicable and inexcusable, and those who practice it need to take a long, hard look at themselves and what they’re doing. Elephants have been with us for millions of years. Are we really going to allow them to disappear within the blink of an eye just because a handful of people take pleasure from killing them?”

Legendary explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes is another leading name to have thrown his weight behind the campaign: “Our children will despise us if we let elephants die out. We should hang our heads in shame at what’s going on. People who kill elephants for fun need to be stopped. We need a global ban and tough jail terms for trophy hunting and poaching.”

Dr Mark Jones, Head of Policy at the Born Free Foundation, likened trophy hunting to a ‘colonial-era obsession’: “Born Free is opposed to the killing of any animal for sport or pleasure. Trophy hunting is a relic of a colonial-era obsession with killing iconic and often rare wild animals for sport, and has no place in progressive conservation programmes.”

Politicians from across the political spectrum have condemned Botswana’s plans and backed a ban on trophy hunting. Sir Ed Davey MP (Lib Dem) said: “The case for legal hunting of elephants ranges from weak to immoral. Legal hunting can often act as a cover for illegal hunting, endangering the species – and the idea that tourist money trickles down to support local people who then prevent poaching simply isn’t proven. We need the ban – and we need to resource its enforcement, urgently.”

Chris Williamson MP (Labour) added: “The appalling, indiscriminate killing of elephants for their tusks is barbaric. There has been a spate of killings in Botswana, a previous safe haven for these beautiful creatures. That’s why I am calling on the Botswana Government to take action to address the slaughter of these animals without delay”.