

IFAW destroys giant tusk of unwanted ivory in its campaign to protect elephants

(London, 12 April 2005) The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) today sent sparks flying in central London as it publicly destroyed a giant tusk - made from pieces of unwanted ivory - in a symbolic rejection of the ivory trade.

Saba Douglas-Hamilton watched as IFAW cut the Memorial Tusk into pieces with an angle grinder in Trafalgar Square. The resulting showers of sparks and plumes of ivory dust proved a graphic reminder of the deadly and destructive nature of the ivory trade, as IFAW urged the public and would-be consumers: "Don't buy ivory - it belongs to elephants".

TV wildlife presenter Saba said: "In 1989 I witnessed Kenya burning 12 tonnes of ivory, a stark and terrible memorial to thousands of elephants and many Kenyan rangers shot down by poachers' bullets. It was a brave stand for Kenya to make, to show that ivory has no price.

"Today IFAW's message to the world is clear - ivory kills! So don't buy it, don't sell it, don't wear it. I support this whole-heartedly."

Jenny Hawley, IFAW's wildlife trade campaigner, says: "Elephants are intelligent and sociable animals, capable of enormous suffering. Many populations are also at risk of extinction. People must remember that every ivory item they buy increases the demand, which is met by poachers.

"IFAW believes ivory belongs to elephants. The only way to stop elephants being killed for their tusks is to make ivory worthless."

Decades of unrelenting slaughter of African elephants for their ivory saw numbers plummet from 1.3 million in 1979 to 609,000 in 1989. Today elephants are still endangered - especially in Asia and the forests of Central & West Africa. In the past six years, 95 tonnes of ivory has been seized worldwide, which represents more than 15,000 dead elephants. A lot more ivory smuggling goes undetected.

Jenny Hawley added: "By destroying its own 'stockpile', IFAW is calling for all countries with ivory stockpiles to put them beyond use for ever. If we want to safeguard the future of elephants, then all international discussions must focus on proper long-term conservation measures rather than trade."

South Africa, Namibia and Botswana may soon be allowed to sell their ivory stockpile to Japan for commercial trade in that country, once certain conditions have been met. IFAW opposes these sales because it is impossible to tell the difference between legal and illegal ivory once on the market, and so the sales could spell disaster for already vulnerable populations.

The Memorial Tusk was built using the 700 pieces of ivory that were donated to IFAW by members of the public during an ivory 'amnesty' last year. The ivory pieces cut from the Tusk will later be ground down into powder and placed in an hourglass to symbolise that time is running out for elephants.

An IFAW petition of over 100,000 signatures calling for an end to all legalised ivory trade was handed over to the Minister of Environment, Elliot Morley, at his Defra office following the event.