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## **Comments on the import of ivory from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe to Japan and the auction for it**

### **Japan Wildlife Conservation Society (JWCS)**

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### **Comments**

The import of ivory and the auction for it is a message to poacher and smuggler encouraging such activities.

The import of ivory and the auction for it will stimulate the potential demand for ivory in Japan and encourage the smuggling.

It is impossible to eliminate ivory products of illegal sources from Japanese ivory market under the present Japanese management system.

Consequently, the risk of extinction of elephant will be increased.

### **Background**

Although the international ivory trade ban has impacted Japan's domestic ivory trade, the potential demand for ivory name seals ("hanko") in Japan remains immense - possibly over two times higher than the level of legal imports that was allowed at the CITES Standing Committee held in last February.

Should imports again become legal there are grounds to fear revitalized trade demand exceeding levels of legal supply.

The infrastructure of the ivory trade - wholesalers, retail outlets etc. - is still extensively in place in Japan.

Even with no legal imports, dwindling ivory stocks, and many consumers (aware of the

trade ban) avoiding purchasing ivory, large scale consumption of ivory continues. One volume retailer group continuing special sale of ivory hanko as well as other material hanko, for example recorded total sales amounting to 6 billion JPY (52 million USD) in 1997.

Should legal imports resume all the ingredients exist for the resurrection of huge consumer demand, inadequate legal supply and (should the Japanese government's trade management system prove inadequate) a resumption in illegal trade of ivory including Asian elephant ivory, which is commonly perceived as being of superior quality than African ivory.

In order to eliminate the ivory products of illegal sources from the market, it is essential to differentiate the products of legally acquired ivory from those of illegal sources.

Although the Japanese government has recently revised its management system, basic flaws remain.

First, dealers are not required to record individual hanko transactions, there is no way of authenticating the ledgers dealers themselves keep, or of establishing whether ivory hankos on sale correspond to those entered in ledgers.

Second, in order to trace a hanko's origin to source, the ledgers of all the handlers - importer, original wholesalers, secondary wholesaler, retailer, final consumer outlet - must be checked. Given that there are at least 14,000, perhaps as many as 50,000 outlets, the Japanese government's revised management system is as unworkable as the original management system rejected by the Panel of Experts in 1997.

Note: For this report Japan Wildlife Conservation Society (JWCS) polled 151 wholesalers and 1,757 randomly selected retailers. JWCS conducted discussions with government bodies, consumer groups etc.

**JWCS** is an organization that was established to study the philosophy needed for real conservation of wildlife and recommend the practical theory or solution for specific issues both domestically and internationally.

Under the objective, **JWCS** is conducting study, investigation, lobbying and campaign for public awareness.