

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

His Excellency Fumio Kishida  
Prime Minister of Japan  
Cabinet Secretariat  
Government of Japan  
1-6-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku  
Tokyo 100-8968  
Japan

October 29, 2021

**Re: Closure of Japan’s Domestic Ivory Market**

Your Excellency:

Congratulations on your recent appointment as leader of the Liberal Democratic Party and on assuming the role of Prime Minister. We also congratulate the Japanese government for hosting a successful Olympic and Paralympic Games despite the enormous challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**We write today to express our concern regarding Japan’s domestic ivory market – and we urge you as the leader of the Government of Japan to take steps to close its market to protect elephants from the threat of poaching, hunting, and slaughter of elephant populations.**

We, along with our colleagues in Congress, have repeatedly appealed to the Government of Japan to take steps to close its ivory market. A recent bipartisan opinion piece by United States former Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and James Baker III has again elevated public discussion and concerns around the dangerous impacts Japan’s ivory market has on fueling the transnational illegal ivory trade and the reduction of global elephant populations.<sup>1</sup> We echo their appeal and urge you to end the sale in and trade of elephant ivory.

Elephants continue to face the threat of being poached for their ivory. The poaching and slaughtering of elephants is threatening their very existence. Earlier this year, the International Union for Conservation (IUCN) revised its listing for African elephants based on updated population numbers and threat levels – with savanna elephants and forest elephants being designated as “endangered” and “critically endangered” respectively.<sup>2</sup>

Many other countries with large consumer economies have already taken steps to close their ivory markets – including the United States, China, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Hong Kong,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/26/elephant-ivory-japan-hillary-clinton-james-baker/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iucn.org/news/species/202103/african-elephant-species-now-endangered-and-critically-endangered-iucn-red-list>

Taiwan, and recently Israel.<sup>3</sup> Since Japan is the largest remaining legal ivory market, closing this market would signal Japan's commitment to protecting elephants and supporting conservation efforts across the international community.

Reducing regional and global demand for ivory is critical to ending its illegal trade and protecting elephants from extinction.<sup>4</sup> Legal ivory markets complicate enforcement efforts by creating a "gray market" where some ivory product sales are legal, and others are illicit.

Japan's market is an example of how lax laws and regulations around legal ivory markets contain many loopholes and make illicit activity hard to track. For example, even after some regulatory reforms, cut pieces of tusks are exempt from registration requirements that make it possible to track individual pieces; to launder an illegal whole tusk, all one has to do is cut it into pieces.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, Japan's legal ivory market poses the risk of facilitating illegal ivory imports. Since other countries are closing their ivory markets, international buyers are purchasing ivory in legal markets like Japan's and then illegally exporting ivory to nations with closed markets, such as China.<sup>6</sup> These shifting markets – coupled with dwindling ivory supply and the legal market driving demand for ivory in Japan – pose a significant risk that Japan will see illegal ivory imports increase. Therefore, the Government of Japan has an opportunity now to prevent this type of activity by closing their legal domestic ivory market immediately.

We encourage you to join as a key, indispensable global partner in the fight against international organized crime around illegal ivory trade. We agree with former US Secretaries Clinton and Baker: Japan must act now to protect elephants.

In times of global uncertainty, Japan brought the world together for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In the wake of the Games, we hope that Japan can join the United States and other countries in protecting the future of elephants for generations to come. **We strongly urge Japan to close its market for elephant ivory trade.**

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please reach out to our offices with any questions. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

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<sup>3</sup> Notification to the Parties No. 2020/074 (cites.org)

<sup>4</sup> World\_Wildlife\_Report\_2020\_9July.pdf (unodc.org)

<sup>5</sup> Environmental Investigation Agency. 2019. Persistent Problem: Japan's Domestic Ivory Trade. Including Infographic: Japan's Ivory Trade Loopholes. <https://eia-global.org/reports/20190807-persistent-problem-japan-domestic-ivory-trade>; Japan Tiger & Elephant Fund. May 2019. Compelled to Close: Top 5 Reasons for Closing Japan's Domestic Ivory Market. [https://www.jtef.jp/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/IvoryReport2019\\_en.pdf](https://www.jtef.jp/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/IvoryReport2019_en.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> <https://eia-global.org/japansillegallivoryexports>



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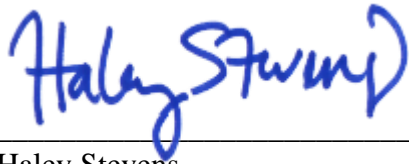
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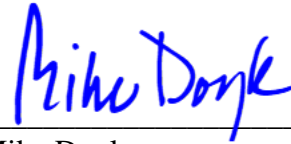


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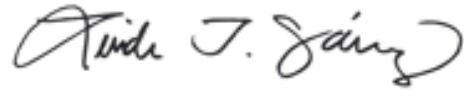
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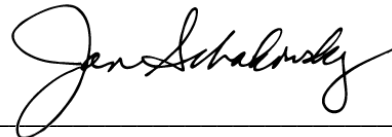
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Jan Schakowsky  
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CC: Yuriko Koike, Governor, Tokyo Metropolitan Government