



February 23, 2009

To Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

In mid-January 2009, the Canadian government dispatched a delegation of politicians and bureaucrats at the expense of tax-payers to meet with elected officials from the European Union. Just prior to their arrival, the government e-mailed an official document to Members of the European Parliament that outlined “facts” about the Canadian government’s policies on matters related to the commercial exploitation of wildlife.

First and foremost amongst the claims was that “Canada is committed to, and has a long history of setting humane standards for animal welfare“, and that it has “strong legislation to protect the welfare of animals” which includes severe penalties under the provisions of its Criminal Code.

This claim could not be farther from the truth.

Canadian organizations dedicated to improving conditions of both domestic and wild animals can testify to a multitude of examples of how Canada trails behind many European countries and dozens of others when it comes to animal welfare.

For example, it is legal in Canada to train animals to fight each other. The animal cruelty provisions under the Criminal Code of Canada offer virtually no protection for wild and stray animals. These provisions do not even include a definition for “animal”. And wildlife is specifically exempt in most provincial animal cruelty.

Canada does not have an animal welfare act. Crimes against animals are prosecuted under the property section of the Criminal Code of Canada – which has remained almost completely unchanged since it was enacted by Queen Victoria in 1892. The most recent amendments to the Criminal Code passed in the House of Commons last year did not attempt to modernize existing provisions that do so little to protect animals in our country. Loopholes and outdated language continue to result in conviction rates of less than 1% for those charged with crimes of cruelty to animals.

Before our government can rightfully claim that it considers the enforcement of animal welfare standards as an important component of Canada’s legislative and regulatory system, there needs to be political will and a real engagement with organizations who are active in this field. It is time Canada adopts and enforces animal welfare standards widely practiced elsewhere in the 21st century.

Misleading elected officials abroad about these facts is just plain wrong.

Sincerely,



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