

Statement re Ely the elephant at Zoológico de San Juan de Aragón, Mexico.

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The Born Free Foundation is an international wildlife organisation working worldwide to promote compassionate conservation and animal welfare. Since 1984, Born Free has been raising awareness about the plight of captive wild animals and encourages support to keep wildlife in the wild.

Born Free has been asked to provide a statement about the 42-year-old female African elephant named Ely kept at Zoológico de San Juan de Aragón, Mexico. We have not observed Ely directly but are making this statement on the basis of information in reports we have received from concerned Mexican citizens, along with video footage we have been forwarded, which appears to support the concerns that have been expressed for Ely's physical and psychological health and welfare.

We are also aware that detailed expert statements issued about Ely earlier this year have criticised the facility in which she is being kept and the associated management practices employed as 'inadequate and outdated' and have raised serious concerns for her welfare.

For many years Born Free has highlighted concerns about the welfare of elephants in captivity. There is considerable evidence that the keeping of elephants in captivity is damaging for their physical and psychological health and well-being. It is also widely acknowledged that keeping such a social species alone, denying their basic need for companionship, invariably risks compromising their welfare. Born Free's recent report '[Elephants in Zoos: A Legacy of Shame](#)' revealed the plight and suffering of elephants in zoos across Europe and North America, and laid bare the impact of captivity on the health and welfare of the animals involved.

Examination of video footage appears to show Ely displaying some concerning stereotypic behaviours including swaying and head-bobbing. Such stereotypic behaviours are believed to be a consequence of long-term psychological damage resulting from confinement in impoverished, stressful environments. We also understand that Ely has a degenerative, chronic bone condition that particularly affects her right foreleg, which appears evident in video footage we have seen. Joint and foot problems are common in zoo elephants, and may be the result of excessive body weight, lack of exercise and inadequate flooring. Excess weight bearing on joints and feet can damage leg ligaments as well as contributing to arthritis, which may cause significant pain.

As a member of the Pro Elephant Network (PREN), Born Free supports the call for an urgent independent assessment of Ely by internationally recognised experts in elephant health and welfare. We are aware that in a letter dated 22nd February 2022, PREN has previously offered the expertise of their members and is willing to assist by discussing alternatives and practical solutions to improve Ely's quality of life, although we do not believe that the relevant zoo authorities have responded. The option of transferring Ely to a suitable elephant sanctuary where she can receive dedicated lifetime care and the company of other elephants has also been offered, and we would urge that this option is given serious consideration.

Recognising that they cannot provide adequate conditions to meet their physical and psychological needs, an increasing number of zoos across the world have closed their elephant exhibits over recent years. We would urge the management of Zoológico de San Juan de Aragón and the relevant authorities in Mexico to engage with independent elephant specialists, in order to find the best solution for Ely and to commit to ending the keeping of elephants at the facility.