

January 22, 2009

To: Editor, The Egyptian Gazette

From: Karl Ammann

Dear Sir,

The front page of the January 21st edition of your paper prominently featured an article concerning the refusal by Bulgaria to extradite a Lebanese national sentenced to 15 years in prison for his involvement in the trafficking of antiquities. On page two was another article concerning the "restoring" of numerous artifacts "stolen" by Sweden early in the last century. As the producer of a 2005 documentary entitled "The Cairo Connection" which exposed the smuggling of endangered wildlife by Egyptian traffickers, I wish to point out the double standard which your country displays in its harboring of illegally obtained wildlife.

Egypt is a signatory to the United Nations CITES convention which regulates the international trade in wildlife and outlaws the exportation of such highly endangered species as gorillas and chimpanzees. My film documents with overwhelming evidence the prominent role played by Egyptian nationals in supplying the demand for endangered animals from Central Africa into Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East. Nevertheless, and despite numerous appeals directly to Egypt's Minister of Agriculture and to Egypt's Commander of Environmental Police, Egyptian officials have failed to take any effective actions toward: a) the prosecution of known traffickers, b) the prosecution of buyers and collectors, c) the confiscation of illegally held animals, or d) the repatriation of such animals back to their countries of origin (which can be determined by DNA analysis of hair and fecal samples).

I find the parallels between Egypt's efforts to reclaim its national treasures, and its failure to address the provenance of its illegally obtained wildlife, to be numerous and glaringly contradictory. Both cases involve treasured natural resources looted from third world countries in disregard of numerous national and international laws. In both cases the end-consumers are usually wealthy and influential individuals, and both types of acquisitions are frequently irreparably damaged by being displayed in unsuitable environments. Unlike artifacts of Egyptian history, however, animals confined under appalling and neglectful conditions may not survive the short-term much less the ages. Such is the case of apes exposed to desert temperatures, whose rarity in the world today may even exceed that of ancient artifacts.

Your page 2 article states that Egypt has assembled an investigative body which , "*...has warned that it will sever relations with foreign museums which knowingly display stolen antiquities*". When it comes to the abundance of animal contraband being illegally held within Egypt, however, Egyptian officials continue to deny accountability and express no intention of addressing repatriation or improving conditions for animal welfare.

My documentary "The Cairo Connection" has been broadcast widely and acclaimed internationally (including a "*Genesis*" award from Hollywood, South African award for "*Best Environmental Journalism in Africa*", "*Best Conservation Message*" at a major international wildlife film festival, in addition to contributing to my being named a "*Hero of the Environment*" by TIME Magazine). I have provided copies of the film to numerous Egyptian officials, none of whom have ever disputed the evidence it sets forth or countered with opposing arguments.

This is an open letter which I intend to disseminate to various officials and organizations, and would greatly appreciate if you would print in your publication and/or include as a forum item on your webpage. Additionally, I will suggest to Swedish officials that, in negotiating the return of antiquities at the behest of the Egyptian government, they too give it serious consideration.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Karl Ammann,  
Nanyuki, Kenya

