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Stockpiles of Dead Tigers Should be Destroyed, Experts Urge China

Beijing – Disturbing new images of tiger carcasses piled up in cold storage at one of China’s largest “tiger farms” raise questions about enforcement of tiger trade bans in effect in China and internationally.

The photos were taken by participants invited to a government-sponsored workshop and tour of China’s two largest tiger “farms” earlier this month for international observers and scientists. The tour was held on the heels of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) agreeing in June that captive breeding of tigers should be restricted “only to conserving wild tigers.”

“What is the point of these stockpiles when tiger trade is banned inside and outside China?” asked Belinda Wright of the Wildlife Protection Society of India, who participated in the State Forestry Administration’s tiger farm tour and tiger trade workshop. “The 171 member nations of CITES made it clear last month that ‘tigers should not be bred for their parts and derivatives.’”

Among the carcasses piled in a refrigerated building at the tiger farm in Guilin, China, was a tiger that had been skinned and another that had been gutted. CITES officials formally asked China in June to investigate illegal sales of tiger meat at the Guilin farm.

Tiger “farms” in China house nearly 5,000 live tigers, and farm investors are pressuring the government to lift a ban on tiger trade so that they can profit from the sale of skins, bones and other body parts of tigers after they die. The Guilin farm’s owner submitted a report to CITES saying he was saving the tigers in cold storage for the day when trade is legalized in China.

“Given that these bodies are commercially valuable and their sale is prohibited by law, they amount to contraband,” said Adam Roberts of Born Free Foundation. “Why not burn them the way other illegal wildlife products are burned in China?”

The 35 organizations of the International Tiger Coalition stand ready to offer guidance and technical support to China on shutting down its tiger farms and stepping up law enforcement efforts to stamp out illegal trade of tiger parts. The Coalition encourages China to invest more resources in increasing its wild tiger population, which could rebound quickly with proper protection.

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