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To,

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020

1. Shri Prakash Javadekar,  
The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change,  
[minister.inb@gov.in](mailto:minister.inb@gov.in), [mefcc@gov.in](mailto:mefcc@gov.in), [secy-moef@nic.in](mailto:secy-moef@nic.in)
2. Private Secretary to Minister  
The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change  
[mahesh.png@gov.in](mailto:mahesh.png@gov.in)
3. The Director General of Forests & Special Secretary  
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change  
[dgfindia@nic.in](mailto:dgfindia@nic.in)
4. The Additional Director General of Forest (WL)  
Shri Sanjay Kumar  
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change  
[igfwl-mef@nic.in](mailto:igfwl-mef@nic.in); [adgwl-mef@nic.in](mailto:adgwl-mef@nic.in); [sanjay.kumar77@nic.in](mailto:sanjay.kumar77@nic.in)
5. Mr Noyal Thomas  
Project Elephant (PE)  
Inspector General of Forest  
[igf.fp-mef@gov.in](mailto:igf.fp-mef@gov.in), [n.thomas15@gov.in](mailto:n.thomas15@gov.in)
6. Mr K Muthamizh Selvam  
Project Elephant (PE)  
SCIENTIST D  
[km.selvan@gov.in](mailto:km.selvan@gov.in)
7. Mr R Gopinath  
Project Elephant (PE)  
Wildlife (WL) ,Project Elephant (PE)  
JOINT DIRECTOR  
[r.gopinath77@nic.in](mailto:r.gopinath77@nic.in)

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**Subject: URGENT Need for an Independent Committee to investigate killings and deaths of 30 elephants all over the country in past six weeks**

Dear Sir,

We are writing to you collectively as organisations working for the protection, advocacy, and betterment of the rights of all animals. We are committed to a change in our perception of animals from commodities to sentient beings who are subjects of equal rights.

It has been over a month since the death of Elephant Soumya in Kerala by consuming a fruit snare with explosives in them. Elephant Soumya's death created a national outrage and demand for a firm investigation and law and policy reform to prevent such violence against animals in the future.

We write to you – with extreme shock and sadness – that we have documented by compiling news reports, over 30 elephant deaths across the country after the death of Soumya between the period of 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020 to 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020. In some cases, these deaths maybe accidents, however in most they appear to have been cases of violent crimes – all of which requires detail, national level, investigation.

This is a highly worrying trend, as Elephants are endangered and protected under the IUCN and also UN Convention for Migratory Species. They are officially recognized as a National Heritage Animal in India with the highest protection under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

The elephant deaths documented below are from 12 states across the country, indicating a national trend where the wild elephant appears to not be safe anywhere. These states are: Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Assam, Meghalaya, Uttarakhand and Kerala. Kindly see the list of the elephant deaths documented by us as follows:

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1. A female elephant dies in Pethukutti, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, on 25 June 2020, cause of death unknown.<sup>1</sup>
2. Elephant touches live wire, dies in Alipurduar, West Bengal on 24 June 2020.<sup>2</sup>
3. On 23 June 2020, a female elephant was found dead in Sirumugai forest range of Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.<sup>3</sup>
4. A female elephant was found dead in Bedapada of Hindol Range of Dhenkanal district Odisha, with severe mouth injuries on 22 June 2020. In addition three elephants have died this year in Dhenkanal forest reserve of herpes infections.<sup>4</sup>
5. On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, a 12-year old elephant with injuries in mouth, like Elephant Soumya, died near Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu<sup>5</sup>.
6. Three years old elephant calf found dead in Amangarh, UP on 20 June 2020.<sup>6</sup> Actual cause of death, unknown.
7. Another Elephant found dead in Angul District of Odisha on 20 June 2020.<sup>7</sup>
8. A carcass of an eight-year-old elephant was found in Ramnagar forest division's Dechauri range, Uttar Pradesh, on 18 June 2020.<sup>8</sup>
9. Once again an elephant was ruthlessly killed by a livewire. The incident took place in Kanchibazar area of Buxa Tiger Project in West Bengal on 18 June 2020.<sup>9</sup>
10. A wild elephant was found dead at a village in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district on Thursday 18 June 2020.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/coimbatore/one-more-elephant-dies-in-pethukutti/articleshow/76633350.cms>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/elephant-touches-live-wire-dies-in-alipurduar/cid/1783552>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Coimbatore/death-of-female-elephant-in-sirumugai-takes-toll-to-12-in-six-months/article31917861.ece>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.orissapost.com/jumbos-in-this-dhenkanal-reserve-forest-are-dying-due-to-a-deadly-herpes-infection-amidst-administrative-apathy/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/in-focus/article/12-year-old-elephant-suffering-from-mouth-injury-found-dead-in-coimbatore/610010>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.jagran.com/uttar-pradesh/meerut-city-three-year-old-elephant-died-in-amangarh-tiger-reserve-forest-range-in-bijnore-20418395.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://kalingatv.com/state/elephant-found-dead-in-angul-district-of-odisha/#:~:text=Angul%3A%20An%20elephant%20was%20found.proceeded%20to%20the%20deep%20forest.>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/carcass-of-an-eight-year-old-elephant-found-in-ramnagar-forest-division-s-dechauri-range/story-dsozcXtOhnoP6HfpTfnbxM.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/live-wire-on-farm-kills-elephant-in-buxa-tiger-reserve/cid/1781502>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/one-more-elephant-found-dead-in-chhattisgarh-sixth-in-10-days/story-HdDDyRc3AihPws6JgkDCAO.html#:~:text=Another%20wild%20elephant%20was%20found,forest%20range%20of%20Dharamjaigarh%20division.>

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11. A three year old elephant was found dead with bullet marks in Boudh, Odisha on 17 June 2020.<sup>11</sup>
12. Elephant dies in West Bengal after coming in contact with live wire on 16 June 2020.<sup>12</sup>
13. Young Elephant electrocuted in Chhattisgarh on 16 June 2020.<sup>13</sup>
14. An elephant calf died after getting stuck in marshland, Dhamatri district in Chhattisgarh on 16th June 2020.<sup>14</sup>
15. A carcass of an eight-year-old female elephant was found in the Dhela range of the Corbett Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh on June 14 2020.<sup>15</sup>
16. An adult elephant found dead in Erode, Tamil Nadu on 14th June 2020.<sup>16</sup>
17. A two-year old calf found dead in Assam on 14th June 2020.<sup>17</sup>
18. Two tusker elephants, aged 22 and 23 years old, found dead in Odisha on 13th June 2020.<sup>18</sup> The tusks of the male elephant were missing. A clear case of illegal poaching for ivory.
19. Carcass of a four months old calf found in Odisha on 13th June 2020.<sup>19</sup> Cause of death suspected from a violent attack.
20. Three elephants, one of them pregnant, found dead in Chhattisgarh on 9, 10 & 11 June 2020.<sup>20</sup>
21. Female elephant found dead in Meghalaya 13th June 2020, it died of injuries sustained from an attack by a 'spear-like object'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/another-elephant-found-dead-in-odisha-forest-bullet-marks-on-its-body/story-sOvIvsieANt7FSPYSESIOP.html#:~:text=A%20bullet%2Dridden%20carcass%20of%20elephant%20was%20killed%20by%20poachers.&text=Forest%20officials%20who%20seized%20the,happened%20%2D3%20days%20ago.>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/west-bengal-elephant-electrocuted-dead-after-coming-contact-with-live-wire-626821>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.businessworld.in/article/Elephant-dies-from-electrocution-in-Chhattisgarh-/16-06-2020-287827/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://theprint.in/india/2-more-elephants-die-in-chhattisgarh-taking-state-toll-to-5-in-one-week/442562/#:~:text=Raipur%3A%20Two%20wild%20elephants%20were,marshland%20in%20Dhamtari%2C%20they%20said.>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/carcass-of-an-eight-year-old-elephant-found-in-ramnagar-forest-division-s-dechauri-range/story-dsozcXtOhnoP6HfpTfnbxM.html#:~:text=On%20June%2014%2C%20a%20carcass,lives%2C%20crops%2C%20and%20properties.>

<sup>16</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/erode/adult-elephant-found-dead-in-reserve-forest/articleshow/76376556.cms>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2abY5jPFow#:~:text=Kamrup%20\(Assam\)%2C%20June%2014,police%20team%20reached%20the%20spot.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2abY5jPFow#:~:text=Kamrup%20(Assam)%2C%20June%2014,police%20team%20reached%20the%20spot.)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/two-elephants-found-dead-inside-reserve-forest-area-in-odishas-koenjar-district-99506#:~:text=COVID%20%2D%2019,-Cured%20%2F%20Discharged&text=Two%20wild%20elephants%20have%20been,poachers%2C%20officials%20said%20on%20Monday.>

<sup>19</sup> <https://odishatv.in/odisha-news/elephant-calf-with-wound-mark-found-dead-in-odisha-456677>

<sup>20</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/three-elephants-one-of-them-pregnant-found-dead-chhattisgarh-orders-probe-6457756/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://shillongtoday.com/female-elephant-found-dead-in-meghalaya/>

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22. A male, Makhna (tuskless) elephant died in Malappuram, Kerala on 8th June 2020.<sup>22</sup> Cause of death unknown.
23. Two elephants aged 12 years and 7 years old found dead in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu on 5th June 2020.<sup>23</sup> Cause of death unknown.
24. Injured elephant died in Dehradun, Uttarakhand on 28th May 2020, allegedly due to a fight between elephants, but still requires a proper investigation.<sup>24</sup>
25. On 28th May 2020, carcass of an elephant was found in MM Hill Wildlife Karnataka on<sup>25</sup>, reports suggest this is the fourth elephant carcass found in the sanctuary in recent weeks. Cause of deaths unknown.
26. Pregnant Elephant Soumya, killed in Palakkad, Kerala on 27th May 2020, after consuming a fruit which had an explosive buried in it.<sup>26</sup>

In most cases above, the deaths appear to be deliberate murders that require investigation. They indicate a growing pattern of abuse, violence and the interference of the right of Elephants to live freely in the wild. In some cases, it is even clear that the deaths are linked to networks of illegal poaching for Ivory. These cases require investigation by a High-Level Committee. An online change.org petition led by activists AS Ramesh has already garnered 2500 signatures seeking a high-level inquiry.<sup>27</sup>

Under Section 39 of the WPA all wild animals are Government Property, **the onus of taking reasonable measures to ensure their safety and wellbeing lies with the Government**. The forest department remains the primary custodian of all elephants whether captive or wild. The Indian constitution under articles 48A and 51A (g) underpins a duty to protect and safeguard the wildlife in the country and show compassion to all living creatures.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/national/2020/06/08/mes14-kl-elephant-fight-death.html>

<sup>23</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/coimbatore/male-elephant-found-dead-on-foothills-of-palamalai/articleshow/76225084.cms>

<sup>24</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/injured-elephant-died-of-excessive-loss-of-blood-fluids-post-mortem-report/articleshow/76078004.cms>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.deccanherald.com/state/top-karnataka-stories/elephant-carcass-found-at-m-m-hill-wildlife-range-842979.html>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2020/jun/05/farmer-arrested-in-connection-with-kerala-elephant-death-2152605.html>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.change.org/p/save-endangered-wild-elephants-32-deaths-since-27-may-2020>

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Hunting of these protected species is a crime under Section 9 of the WPA with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine not below ten thousand rupees. **We need to extend the scope of section 9 to protect Elephants from any kind of criminal violence against them, including their deaths by accidents.**

The above listed incidents are in complete disregard to constitutional mandates and provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act. This disregard towards the interference with the inherent right of elephants to live freely in the wild, has increased crimes against the wildlife, their unregulated killing and leading to an overall loss of biodiversity.

**We request** that a National Level Committee with representatives from investigating agencies, forest departments, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, government and non-government agencies (including wildlife experts and scientists) be constituted to investigate the above listed deaths of wild and captive elephants, and propose long term, effective policy changes to protect elephants from violent crimes.

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4  
(SARANI)

Janani Krishnamurthy ( Kspca )



**KODAIKANAL SOCIETY FOR PROTECTION  
AND CARE FOR ANIMALS  
(KSPCA)**

17/119, Pazadena, Fern Hill Road, Kodaikanal 624101,  
E-mail : spcakadkodaikanal@gmail.com

