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Statement by Joyce Poole, PhD

Undercover footage by PETA of the treatment of elephants by employees of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus between January and June 2009

To whom it may concern,

I have studied elephants and worked for their conservation and welfare for over three decades. I am considered a world expert in the field of elephant behavior and communication. I wish to comment on undercover footage captured by PETA between January and June 2009, showing the treatment of elephants by employees of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus.

Elephants are highly social, complex and intelligent individuals. The footage shows gratuitous violence against them – hitting, poking, jabbing, hooking elephants on the head, ears, trunk and limbs with bullhooks; whipping elephants on the ears, trunk and torso. This form of treatment is painful and causes distress to these individuals; it wounds and injures them and causes them physical and psychological harm and suffering. The unwarranted striking of elephants with bullhooks, whips and other objects keeps them in a constant state of fear and stress so that they will obey and perform on command.

The elephants respond to these blows by closing their eyes, wincing, ducking and jerking their heads away, facing away, stepping forward or backward, and by snorting, trumpeting and screaming in pain. When an elephant is being beaten or shouted at, its neighbors react immediately by trying to do the "right" thing (e.g. trunk-up), so as to avoid being hit. All of these behaviors are obvious signs that the elephants are fearful. Why don't they retaliate? Sometimes they do – but they have learned from years of beatings that disobeying is met with severe brutality.

Elephants in the Ringling Brothers Circus spend the majority of their time chained. In my opinion such chaining and confinement is extremely abusive to any animal – particularly one so large and so active as an elephant. In the wild elephants are on the move all but 3-4 hours in a 24-hour day, covering many miles with their family and companions. I have made tens of thousands of observations of individual wild elephants and have never observed one swaying or head bobbing. The swaying and bobbing exhibited by elephants in the circus is abnormal, stereotypic behavior caused by the confinement these individuals have to endure, year in and year out.

The swaying and lifting of their feet is triggered at a young age, when first chained, when these individuals attempt to walk. Standing for hours chained on concrete or chained in a train leads to arthritis and other physical ailments. As these diseases progress individuals may lift their feet to

relieve physical pain. The increased frequency of stereotypic behaviors preceding performances is related to the stress these elephants experience prior to and during the shows. The chaining and confinement of elephants by Ringling Brothers removes any semblance of normal elephant behavior patterns, as I know them, and is extremely cruel.

Filed this year, this video documents unquestionable abuse of elephants by Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. The casual and repetitive manner in which the handlers strike the elephants demonstrates that such treatment is routine.

What I have observed in the video is completely consistent with the evidence that I reviewed and documented in a 50-page report as an expert witness in the legal case against this circus for their mistreatment of elephants. In reviewing the material for the trial I watched hours of similar footage. As an expert in elephant social behavior I am sickened that human beings can treat innocent creatures in this manner – all in the name of entertainment and making a buck.



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