

Ivory market an example of inhumanity

Badges of wealth vary widely, from jewels to Rolex watches. In recent decades, however, there has come another one – ivory – which is regarded as both a symbol of status and a substance from which religious icons are made.

As a result, however, African elephants have been the victims of this outrageous trend.

For the sake of satisfying the limitless hunger of ivory collectors, especially the rich in China, at least 25,000 elephants are killed every year. Picture the scene. Smell the death. It's cruel and inhumane.

In 1997, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe was quoted as saying elephants must pay for their room and board with their ivory. That is totally ridiculous. We, humans, share the natural world with other living things, and we all have the right to live on this lovely earth. But people have the responsibility to protect it, and Dr Jane Goodall, a primatologist who has devoted all her energy to saving endangered species, was quoted as saying: "If we are the most intellectual creature that has ever walked on the planet, how come we are destroying that planet?"

The supply of ivory is no longer sustainable. It is time for us to rectify our mistakes before an irreversible disaster occurs. Please stop killing elephants!

As a Form Three student, I cannot do anything to help with this situation except to plead with countries worldwide to stop devastating a species that is already losing ground. Before they become extinct, let's save them, and our planet as well.

Celia Ho, Wong Tai Sin



Children can inspire a ban on ivory to save the elephants

Congratulations to Celia Ho for her excellent letter ("Ivory market an example of inhumanity", October 3). While she pointed out many key facts on elephant conservation, the most important point is that she is a Form Three student. That makes the letter even more special because one of the only hopes for elephants and many other species remains with a new generation of young people caring for their planet and taking action.

The past two years have been the worst in recent memory for elephants. Earlier this year, more than 500 elephants were gunned down in Bouba Ndjida National Park in Cameroon in a commando-style operation that lasted for several days. In April, 22 elephants and their babies were killed in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, probably from a helicopter. Courageous rangers and sometimes desperate poachers – they are not all from ruthless organised gangs – are killed every year.

Why is it worth discussing such an issue in Hong Kong, so far away from Africa? As Celia rightly pointed out, elephants are killed only for their ivory, and most of the illegal ivory trade is sold to Asia and especially to Hong Kong and mainland China, cleverly mixed with past legal ivory for resale.

Legal or illegal, ivory kills. It destroyed people's lives in Africa, and it guts the fragile elephant population. If nothing is done, forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) will be the first to be wiped out in just a few years from now. Then the more famous savannah elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) will disappear area by area, country after country in a systematic killing.

In March, there will be an important Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora meeting in Bangkok. A total ban on ivory trade would be the best decision for elephants, but as obvious as it may sound, the ban is not ensured yet.

One thing, however, on which I disagree with Celia is when she says she "cannot do anything to help". Her letter is a spark of hope, and she can spread the message at her school. If her school can inspire more schools in Hong Kong and then on the mainland and elsewhere, then the sparks may become fire with thousands of young people involved.

Children have the right to decide the future of their planet, especially when adults fail to be smart enough. It may sound too simple and candid for some, but who better to talk and convince parents than their children? When they talk, people listen, and their power is far stronger than the biggest conservation groups combined.

Celia, you can save elephants!

Christian Pilard, Sai Kung