



IUCN SSC PSG SGA Statement on the Trade of Great Apes from Range States to Ex-situ Facilities

IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group (Section on Great Apes)
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The Section on Great Apes (SGA) of the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group, a team of experts engaged in research, management, monitoring and conservation of great apes, provides this position statement in response to recent international trades of great apes. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) reports that since 2023, at least eight chimpanzees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 31 chimpanzees from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), one bonobo from UAE, and one gorilla (species unknown) from Haiti and 17 orangutans from Indonesia and the UAE (origin uncertain in some cases) were exported or re-exported to India under questionable circumstances (CITES, 2025a, 2025b). An additional eight chimpanzees were slated to be exported from Cameroon to India, with reportedly forged permits (CITES, 2025b). These great ape taxa are all Endangered and CITES Appendix I-listed. No captive breeding facilities for great apes exist in the DRC, UAE, Haiti, Cameroon or Indonesia (CITES, 2025a, 2025b). In addition, there are well-established, specialized sanctuaries in the DRC, Cameroon, Indonesia and other great ape range states that have extensive expertise and follow international best practice standards in lifetime care of great apes (GFAS, 2025; PASA, 2025). Because there are no breeding facilities in these exporting countries, and no explanation of how these individuals came to be in captivity and no justification provided for why their export was deemed non-detrimental to species conservation, these trades raise concerns about legality.

There is no conservation rationale for taking great apes from wild populations or for relocating or exporting them to zoos. Captive facilities are not a solution for great ape conservation, except for the rehabilitation and subsequent lifetime care of confiscated orphaned or injured individuals in specialized sanctuaries (GFAS, 2019; GRASP & IUCN, 2018; PASA, 2016). When captive care is required for these victims of poaching and illegal trade, best practice sanctuary standards established by Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA) and Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) prioritize placing these individuals in a suitable range state sanctuary, except in extraordinary circumstances where no feasible options exist.

CITES reports that export of 12 chimpanzees from a range state sanctuary to India was planned with the stated purpose of addressing overpopulation and sanitation in the sanctuary and risks from armed conflict in the area (CITES, 2025b). They also report that 16 Bornean and Sumatran orangutans from Indonesia, the UAE or “unknown” locations, and one Tapanuli orangutan re-exported by UAE but originating from Indonesia, were imported by India (CITES, 2025b). Both DRC and Indonesia have multiple specialized sanctuaries for the care of native great ape taxa; hence there is no conservation rationale for export of confiscated individuals. Export of animals from range states is not a solution, and management concerns alone do not constitute a justifiable conservation rationale to remove animals from specialized, and in many cases PASA- or GFAS-accredited, sanctuaries or to relocate them to a facility outside their range country. The only

sustainable way to prevent overpopulation in wildlife sanctuaries is to prevent wild animals from needing sanctuary care in the first place, which requires protecting species and their habitats and preventing the removal of animals from the wild. The assertion that newly-confiscated infant great apes should be taken from African or Asian range states to receive care defies logic and good welfare practices, as these individuals are highly vulnerable and the most in need of immediate, expert care in the company of their conspecifics.

As noted in CITES Resolution 13.4, great apes are already well represented in zoos worldwide, and thus the removal of additional individuals from the wild is unlikely to be justifiable even in exceptional circumstances (CITES, 2012). Ex-situ breeding populations of chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas and orangutans have been long-established in zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), or adhering to the standards of the World Association of Zoos and Aquaria (WAZA). Controlling breeding is considered an essential element of managing these populations, and many institutions already have surplus individuals (AZA, 2017a, 2017b; Bemment, 2018; Bemment et al., 2024; Carlsen et al., 2022; Stevens, 2020). Accredited zoo programs trade animals for conservation breeding and welfare purposes, but do not accept individuals captured from the wild if these captures would negatively impact the wild populations or contravene conservation goals (AZA, 2016; AZA, 2026; Barongi et al., 2015; EAZA, 2025; WAZA, 2023). Further, as noted in our position statement, *IUCN SSC PSG SGA Statement on the Translocation of Great Apes from Zoos to African Great Ape Range States*, the SGA does not recommend releases of great apes from ex-situ zoos in great ape range states due to the unacceptably high health and welfare risks to released individuals, and the social, genetic and disease risks to resident wild great apes (IUCN SSC PSG SGA, 2024). Hence, creating new breeding programs for great apes raises questions about these programs' purpose and scientific justification.

The SGA is concerned that the demand for wild animals to stock captive facilities in India or elsewhere could drive additional poaching and trade of wild great apes. This demand for live specimens may drive illegal harvest of wild individuals that are later falsely traded as captive-bred (see CITES, 2025b; Perinchery, 2025). Although confiscations are an important component of wildlife law enforcement, the fact that wild animals have been confiscated or orphaned is evidence that poaching and trade need to be urgently addressed to protect wild populations (Sherman & Greer, 2018). This is particularly the case for great apes, because obtaining live infant apes involves killing their family members (GRASP & IUCN, 2018).

The SGA condemns the removal of great apes from their range states and strongly encourages increased national and international action to protect wild great apes in their natural habitats, with a focus on addressing poaching and illegal trade, and mitigation of key threats to species survival including habitat loss and fragmentation and disease risk (GRASP & IUCN, 2018).

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