

Condemning Statement

We strongly condemn the actions of the competent state authorities of the Republic of Armenia, specifically the responsible officials of the Yerevan Municipality, the Yerevan Zoo (the Zoo), and law enforcement agencies, which were carried out during the relocation of rare breed lions and other wild animals (the animals) belonging to Gagik Tsarukyan, the President of the "Prosperous Armenia" Party and businessman.

According to publicly available information, the decision for the forced relocation of the animals was executed without prior veterinary examination, necessary laboratory testing, or expert opinion, which were mandatory for the preliminary assessment of the animals' health condition, forecasting relocation risks, and ensuring the safety of general anesthesia.

It is unacceptable if an animal's health issues became known only after its death, rather than as a result of a proper examination conducted beforehand. This was an obligation of the state and the authorities to properly implement and ensure this process.

The videos and information published in local media and social networks have raised serious concerns and questions among worried citizens of the public and environmental specialists regarding the legality, proportionality, and professional justification of the actions taken against the animals.

If the procedures defined by the legislation of the Republic of Armenia and international treaties were not observed during the intervention implemented by state bodies, if the principle of proportionality was violated, if the requirements of the procedure for animal anesthesia were not ensured, and if the necessary professional conclusions and guarantees are missing, then such actions may contradict the fundamental principles of a state governed by the rule of law, the principles of legality enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, and the requirements of lawful administration, as well as cast doubt on the actions of the competent authorities.

Every action of the state bodies of the Republic of Armenia must be based not only on being authorized by law, but also on professional justification, necessity, and proportionality. Otherwise, any intervention, no matter how much it is presented in the light of the law, can raise questions regarding its justification, necessity, proportionality, and appropriateness.

Obviously, it is as a result of the actions of state bodies that the lions were subjected to unnecessary stress, ending up in a situation dangerous to their health and lives. The state structures of the Republic of Armenia, including law enforcement agencies and responsible officials of the Zoo, could not exercise their powers by means of force or other demonstrative actions, or adopt a manner of operation that would lead the public to believe that this intervention was politically motivated. Today, a perception has been formed among the general public that these animals have become indirect victims of a political process or confrontation. Unfortunately, we register the fact that in our reality, a rare breed lion named Sarah became that indirect victim.

The real power of state authority is not demonstrated by whom it is applied against, but by how equally, legally, proportionally, and responsibly it is applied to everyone, regardless of the person, social status, or political views.

The reputation of the state is formed not by a display of force, but by the legal justification, transparency, and accountability of every action. When these principles are not maintained, or when reasonable doubts arise regarding their maintenance, not only trust in the given process is damaged, but also the reputation of the state governed by the rule of law. The public has a full right to demand clarifications and answers to questions regarding the legality, professional justification, and accountability of state bodies' actions.

Any administrative action must be based on the principles of the rule of law, legality, necessity, proportionality, and professional responsibility. These requirements apply not only to the protection of human rights, but also to the state's obligations towards animals, since in a civilized society, a humanitarian attitude towards animals is also one of the important criteria of a state governed by the rule of law. In this case, regardless of where that animal is located or who it belongs to, the process of general anesthesia during its relocation should have been based exclusively on professional knowledge and compliance with veterinary and safety rules.

The state is obliged to ensure that any intervention carried out against wild animals is performed exclusively in accordance with professional standards, all possible risks to the lives and health of animals are minimized, and every decision is based on professional conclusions rather than unjustified actions.

The rule of law is not measured by how quickly the state intervenes or responds, but by how lawful, professional, and responsible that intervention or response is. In this case, state authority and an administrative decision can never replace a professional conclusion and prevail over the life, health, and welfare of an animal.

If damage was caused to wild animals or their lives were endangered as a result of the actions or inaction of officials, leading to their death, then these circumstances are subject to a full, independent, comprehensive, and transparent investigation to determine the legality of the actions of all responsible people and the strict necessity of the professionally hasty decisions.

We do not consider it redundant to mention that the Republic of Armenia is preparing to host the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 17)—an environmental event of global significance, during which our country will be the focus of international attention. This circumstance places a higher responsibility on the state bodies of Armenia to prove through their daily activities that laws are respected in our country, the principles of legality are maintained, as well as the principles of animal welfare are ensured and environmental values are preserved.

It is unacceptable when Armenia presents itself in international arenas as a bearer of the values of biodiversity and wildlife conservation, while inside the country, reasonable doubts or questions arise regarding the professional and legal justification of the actions of state bodies. Such contradictions not only damage trust in individual processes but can also negatively reflect on Armenia's international reputation.

A responsible attitude towards nature and the animal world begins not from the international conferences, but from every state decision, the professional responsibility of every official, and

unconditional respect for the law; and the attitude towards them is one of the most important criteria of the legal and moral culture of the society and the state.

A state that expects public trust is first and foremost obliged to prove by its own actions that the law, professional responsibility, and humanitarianism stand above any other considerations or political processes.

Therefore, we expect that all the raised questions will receive legal, professional, and public trust-inspiring answers, and, if necessary, all those individuals whose actions or inaction are confirmed as a gross violation of the law will be held accountable.

Based on the foregoing and guided by the RA Constitution, the principles of the rule of law, lawful administration, professional responsibility, and public accountability, we demand to:

- **Publish** the full legal grounds, administrative acts, directives, and all those documents on the basis of which the decision regarding the relocation, general anesthesia, and subsequent care of the wild animals was made.
- **Publish** all veterinary documents, professional conclusions, laboratory test results (if available) drawn up during and before the relocation of the animals, as well as the documents on the basis of which it was decided to apply general anesthesia.
- **Ensure** an independent, comprehensive, objective, and transparent investigation to determine whether the actions of the state bodies and the involved officials contained signs of possible abuse of power, professional negligence, violation of procedures established by law, or other offenses.
- **Determine** whether the current veterinary rules, internationally accepted standards for ensuring animal welfare, and all mandatory safety requirements were observed during the actions carried out against the wild animals.
- **Publicly present** the results of the investigation and the decisions made on their basis, ensuring the public's right to be informed and the accountability of state bodies.
- **Hold accountable** all those officials whose actions or inaction, if confirmed by the investigation, violated the requirements of the law and professional duties, resulting in endangering the animal's life.
- **Ensure** the full protection of the life, health, and welfare of the other animals in the Zoo, excluding any action towards them that does not stem from professional necessity or could endanger their natural state.
- **Create** an independent professional commission with the participation of specialists in the fields of veterinary medicine, zoology, and law to provide a comprehensive professional assessment of the actions carried out and to develop unified procedures to be applied in similar cases in the future.

"Ecological Society"

"The A.D. Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Protection Centre" NGO