

Latin America and Caribbean NGOs Requests to the Buenos Aires Group

Oriental Republic of Uruguay, 5 to 8 August 2013

The organizations signed to this letter wish to express our appreciation for the conduction of this new meeting of the Buenos Aires Group in the city of Montevideo, Uruguay. The continuity of the articulated work between member governments is of vital importance considering the new scenario of biannual meetings of the International Whaling Commission (IWC); and particularly because it grants the opportunity to advance in strategic issues such as the strengthening of the Buenos Aires Group and the implementation of the Latin American Strategy of Cooperation for the Conservation of Cetaceans, adopted by the Group in December 2007.

As civil society organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean we wish to present our concerns and requests to face the challenges in relation to the conservation and non-lethal use of cetaceans within the IWC.

At a time when Japan's whaling operations in Antarctica are being evaluated by the International Court of Justice due to its violations to the ICRW – such as the non compliance of the procedures established by the Convention and its commercial character, among others – we believe it is essential that the Buenos Aires Group publicly reiterate its support to the Australian position, which is shared by the region in multiple resolutions adopted by the Commission against the so-called “scientific” whaling, statements and press releases of the Buenos Aires Group and joint diplomatic actions with like-minded countries.

This will reaffirm the commitments of the Buenos Aires Group in relation to the integrity of sanctuaries, especially considering the progress made towards the adoption of the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary proposal. In this regard, we request the Buenos Aires Group, and especially to co-sponsor countries of the proposal, to continue working in the updating of the scientific information and increasing the support of African countries, so that it can be adopted in 2014.

Considering the importance of the non lethal use of whales for our region – as a tool for the development of coastal communities and the commitments of the Buenos Aires Group in relation to the maintenance of the moratorium and the integrity of whale sanctuaries – we request the Buenos Aires Group to take actions to prevent the involvement of the region in controversial whaling operations conducted in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. In this sense, we believe it is essential that the government of Panamá to proceed according to its commitments to whale protection and environmental conservation, removing the flag of the South Korean vessel Sun Laurel, which supplies fuel and assists the Japanese whaling fleet in Antarctica.

Regarding the new regime of biannual meetings of the IWC, which includes the establishment of a bureau where the interests of the Buenos Aires Group will be represented by the Commissioner of Panama, we believe that in order to modernize the work of the Commission the bureau should operate transparently, ensuring timely access to information about its meetings and the issues discussed.

In relation to aboriginal subsistence whaling, we wish to express our concern about the decision taken by Denmark/Greenland to continue this hunts despite the rejection of the whaling quotas in 2012 due to its lack of compliance with minimum requirements and its increasing commercial character. As member of the IWC, the government of Denmark should comply with the decision adopted by the majority of the Commission. In this regard we request the Buenos Aires Group to strongly oppose the unilateral decision taken by Denmark/Greenland and to urge the country to remove all the commercial components of its aboriginal subsistence whaling.

We would also like to take this opportunity recall that during the annual meeting of the IWC in 2012, the Commissioners of Brazil and Colombia announced that they would strive to stop the killing of more than two thousand river dolphins in the Amazon as a result of pot fishery. In this regard we wish to make a call to take immediate actions and that the Buenos Aires Group address this issue in order to move towards the adoption of measures to ensure the conservation of the species throughout its range.

Also, we believe it is necessary to strengthen the role of cetacean research specialists in the Scientific Committee of the IWC, especially considering the increasing importance that this organ is taking after the implementation of biannual meetings, to strengthen conservation and non-lethal use issues that are of the interests of the majority of the members of the IWC and in particular to the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Similarly, we consider fundamental to work with the Buenos Aires Group towards a proposal to improve the participation of civil society at the IWC, in order to present it during next year plenary meeting.

We would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the government of the Dominican Republic for its efforts to strengthen its ties with St. Vincent and the Grenadines in relation to whale watching, as a sustainable local development alternative, in replacement of the controversial aboriginal killing of whales that are increasingly being questioned by the Commission due to its constant irregularities and breaching of IWC regulations.

We also welcome Uruguay's efforts to establish a whale sanctuary in its jurisdictional waters and encourage governments to declare their waters as whale protected areas, following the example of several countries in the region, in order to consolidate the Whale Sanctuary Corridor of the Americas.

We also wish to thank the Government of Uruguay for organizing this new meeting and hope that as a result of these days of work it can establish a strategy for strengthening the Buenos Aires Group by creating a *pro tempore* secretariat to move forward and in a coordinated manner on a communication plan and joint actions, with a view to the upcoming meetings of the International Whaling Commission.

Finally, we thank the Buenos Aires Group for its attention and we hope our considerations and specific requests are positively adopted, since they represent the will of millions of people in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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