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The US Fish & Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

**RE: OPEN LETTER IN RESPONSE TO THE RECENT SUSPENSION ON
IMPORTS OF ELEPHANT TROPHIES FROM TANZANIA AND ZIMBABWE
(PRESS RELEASE OF APRIL 4TH, 2014).**

I write to your respected office as a deeply concerned global citizen – one who is a Tanzanian by identity and legal status. I am a Professional Hunter, Investor and stakeholder in the Tanzanian Tourist Hunting Industry. I have been actively involved in the safari industry since childhood, as part of a family business started by my parents. My parents both came from large families and had humble beginnings. Even basics such as an education were luxuries their parents could not afford. But they had a determination to survive and succeed in context of their circumstances and environment. They did. Despite their handicap of a higher education, lack of professional qualifications and no finances, they worked hard to make a living and made a break-through in the safari business. My father came from a long line of hunters, for whom hunting was a means of providing food for the family and the neighborhood. So even though he hunted often, it was never more than putting protein in the store. But his hunting ways developed into a passion for the outdoors, which in turn progressed into knowledge and experience of the indigenous tribes, wilderness areas, wildlife, vehicle maintenance, bush skills and expertise of firearms and tools.

Very soon, he became renowned for his passion. He ventured far and undertook what nobody else would dare – hence his beginnings as a safari guide, support service provider and finally a Professional Hunter. As a local hunter, he saw a lot of negative, but as a Professional Hunter, he advocated wildlife conservation and development of the Tourist Hunting Industry to what it is today and what I continue to practice as a qualified Tanzanian Professional. This profession of Professional Hunting allowed my parents to give me an

education they never had, supports them to this day, sustains my family presently and enables my children to live a decent life and obtain an education as well. This profession, since my father's time, has been largely supported by hunters worldwide, of which American hunters are a large percentage. This is my history.

Please bear with me as I attempt to build a clear context on this matter. I realize you may find all this irrelevant and just a storyline... but it is a true story. So please give it the few moments it deserves. Trust me, your decision has impacted my reality severely. So I expect you to at the least, get a perspective on what it means to affect lives and destabilize foundations of success.

I am not the only person with such a story. We are many. Some have different details, but the fundamentals are the same. Some have been embraced by good fortune and become citizens of the United States of America and others still live in a remote part of Tanzania with only the start of the hunting season to look forward to. One aspect is common amongst us – hunting is a way of life and we depend on it as a means for survival. It sustains our livelihood and we also protect it with our lives. We are the primary stakeholders and official custodians of our wildlife. We live with our wildlife as a natural resource and give it value through sustainable utilization policies, which have developed over time, into a global industry, of which the US is participant.

Our government acknowledges hunting as part of our national fabric. We were hunters since our early beginnings as man. The concept of hunting has evolved with time and we as hunters, have adapted with it. Our great grandfathers hunted at will. Our grandfathers hunted during a period of colonialism and basic regulation. Our fathers hunted after independence, pioneering a regulated industry. We now hunt in modern times and continue to develop the industry on a legally regulated basis with scientific foundations. Over time, through generations, our cause holds true – sustainable hunting. This translates to wildlife conservation and it equates to lives being sustained, both wild and civil. As modern day professionals, in a country where wildlife is mostly perceived as meat, we partner with the government and global community, to give it a value beyond protein. We make-up and nurture an industry that gives legal and tangible value to wildlife that goes beyond food. Our value on wildlife goes beyond money. In our hunting areas, wildlife is seen by many local communities as access to education, better healthcare, clean water wells, infrastructure development, problem animal control and opportunity for employment and trade. The hunting industry also serves as the

only platform for cultural and social exchange in some areas. Our progressive efforts, in collaboration with the government, worldwide hunters and global stakeholders, ensures that communities benefit, the economy is boosted and ecology is protected. Regulated Tourist Hunting in Tanzania today is a life line to many people from all over the world, Tanzanians and Americans included. This is our history.

I have been fortunate to know some great hunters in my time. I have even met them in person and it is an honor and privilege to share their story and continue their fine pioneering work in Tanzania. I am nowhere near their fame, qualification or reputation, but I would like to believe we share a similar passion for wildlife and dedication to its conservation. I refer to the likes of Robin Hurt, Luke Samaras, Danny McCallum, Gerard Pasanisi, Hilary Daffi, Paulo Shanalingigwa and many more. These gentlemen, many foreign, have dedicated their lives to conservation of wildlife in Tanzania and many other parts of Africa. They have proven practically, successfully and scientifically, their passion for selective and sustainable hunting works as a conservation tool applicable and viable in Africa. In Tanzania, not only does it work, but it is the frontline of wildlife conservation countrywide. Even our National Parks are all born from hunting areas. If hunting were to be stopped in Tanzania today, we would immediately lose 30% of wilderness habitat and a much larger percentage of our wildlife. Even the success of our National Parks is largely attributed to our sustainably practiced hunting policy (buffer zones). This is their story.

This is now my story. I share it because it is real and I can speak clearly and factually about it. It is very relevant to modern day Tanzania. An account of a recent eventuality and clear proof of the importance of hunting in the protection of natural resources and wildlife conservation. It is something you can verify easily, because from being one of the top ecological hotspots in the world only a decade ago, the USAID is today funding it as an agricultural zone under a program called SAGCOT (Southern Agricultural Corridor of Tanzania). This area was explored, surveyed and studied in the 1990's by the Royal Geographic Society (RGS). It was at that time leased to my family, by the government, as a hunting concession. A survey was conducted, recorded and published as "The Kilombero Valley Report, 1997". The report declared this area as having one of the densest wildlife populations anywhere in the world. It was home to 75% of the world's Puku Antelope (60,000). Other figures include; buffalo (30,000), elephant (12,000), lion (600) and hippo (8,000). We utilized the hunting concession for twenty (20) years until we could no longer fight the politics behind the foreign funded teak plantations, illegal cattle encroachment

and political party hostilities. We officially relinquished rights to the concession in 2010 and it was at an arbitration hearing conducted by the 'National Committee on Human Rights & Good Governance' that I insisted it be put on record that our withdrawal from the area was forced by circumstances beyond our control, as a result of being compromised by abuse of authority. I warned the committee, government bodies and local communities that our withdrawal would be the end of a wildlife resource within six months. I was wrong – it was depleted in 3 months!

I speak of The Kilombero Valley in southern Tanzania, bordering the western boundary of the Selous Game Reserve. It has an area of 6,000 square kilometers. The largest inland wetland ecosystem in East Africa. Today, what was only recently a world ecological hotspot, consists of Teak Plantations, Nomadic Cattle beyond carrying capacity, shifting cultivation and plans for an Agricultural Project to be funded by the USAID and other International Donor Agencies. It is a "Game Controlled Area" without much game. No lions, no elephants, a few buffalo and hippo and even fewer Puku Antelope, to the point even poachers have stopped poaching. One of the most catastrophic experiences I have ever had. I still feel guilty and the bitterness never ceases.

But I ask you – who is to blame? Tanzania? USA? The world? Hunters? Politicians? The fact remains – the world has lost an amazing natural resource that was a prized asset. We are all at a loss and worse off for it. We still have resources to salvage, but if we continue to be unwise, there will come a time when such losses will lead to hostilities and fatalities that will have much bigger consequence. Our decisions today, determine our tomorrows. The unfortunate fact is that 'hope' is carried by a few, for the benefit of us all. Even when a nation is at war, it is only a select few that fight it on the frontlines. It is not a majority that actually fights the war. But it is important for the majority to stand firm in support and solidarity of its warriors. Especially the leaders and commanders... or else risk wasting the lives of fine men and women, who fight for a good cause, and forever have their blood on your hands. True patriots, men of valor and honor, make decisions, take action and stand responsible. We fight for what we believe in and what is right and just. We do it for the benefit and betterment of all, hence all people are benefactors.

You may wonder why I have written this letter the way I have. I don't know exactly why it has taken the form it has, but it is written honestly and with good intent. I have tried to express the reality of matters, the on-going challenges and success, history and aspirations in a simple way. To convey a message that can be understood by normal people like myself, qualified and highly

distinguished personalities and people of power and authority. So maybe I should summarize;

I am a hunter. As hunters, we have rich history and valid stance in the scheme of things as man. We are proud of our role, which over time, is a proven strategy for ecological well-being. Lives, livelihoods and resources depend on what we do. Wrong decisions lead to irreparable damage in our industry and natural resources do not recover fast, well, easy or cheap. Decisions in our industry do need to have researched, consulted and firm foundations. We have implemented a system that does not rely on emotion, inclination or rash decision-making. Experience, history, knowledge, science, integrity, ethics, wisdom and dedication are the foundations on which our industry works. We are selfless in our jobs, but will fight to protect what is undoubtedly good for our planet and a resource for our children and future generations. Hunting is our heritage. It should never end nor diminish. It should develop, progress and thrive as a positive practice.

Now I come to your story... what exactly is your story? Please tell us your story in context of your recent decision to ban the import of legally hunted elephants in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Surely you know the importance of a legally regulated industry to a country, its people and its market? What exactly are your motives behind de-valuing a key species in Africa to its allies? Do you not see that you have removed incentive from its' legal protectors and added value to its persecutors? Is it wise to punish and compromise the only active elephant protectors in order to send a message to a government that has little capacity to protect the species? Are you claiming conservation measures by compromising conservation efforts? The Americans you have restricted from importing trophies do not agree with you – so why exactly are you doing this? Why are you not focusing on the actual problem of poaching and habitat loss and helping to deal with it? Why are you making a decision that contradicts all foundations and practicalities of wildlife conservation? Why are you making a decision without consulting the country and people it affects? Do you really believe your decision will help the species? Will you be responsible enough to re-consider your decision in the best interest of conservation?

I ask these questions as a concerned global citizen of Tanzanian nationality and professional in the Tourist Hunting Industry. I am aware of your cited reasons for the suspension of imports on your press release. But I do not believe they are valid, nor justified. In fact, I believe they are of no significance to their claimed cause, an insult to the history of the industry and personalities as

outlined in this letter, a danger to survival of the wild African Elephant and an attack on the wildlife conservation efforts in countries specified. Furthermore, you have subjected me to fail in my professional objectives, handicapped my ability to fulfil family duty and demoralized our good cause consisting of committed and passionate people professionals. Yes you have. I pray for responsibility and accountability, but most of all - wisdom. Sincerity & Faith,
Ryan Shallom.