



World Society for the Protection of Animals

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News Release**

Animal groups call for amnesty on Greece's stray dogs

With the Olympic Games less than two weeks away, the fate of the thousands of stray dogs in Athens remains in doubt, amid fears by animal groups that the authorities may undertake a mass-poisoning campaign to clear the streets of dogs.

The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), along with its hundreds of member societies worldwide (such as the RSPCA and Humane Society International) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare is calling on Greece to issue an assurance that strays will not be subject to any cruel treatment.

Trevor Wheeler, Director of WSPA Europe and the Middle East, said, "Greece is under the spotlight as it prepares to host the 2004 Olympics. We hope that the stray dogs do not fall victim to a knee-jerk reaction of clearing the streets that has been seen in many other countries with stray dog problems. We are continuing to monitor the situation and have offered our assistance in providing long-term humane solutions to deal with these animals."

Estimates put Greece's stray dog population in the hundreds of thousands - some 15,000 of which live in areas that have been designated as Olympic municipalities. The global problem of stray animals was addressed at a conference held in Greece late last year, which was organised by WSPA in conjunction with The Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations. At the Humane Management of Dogs and Cats Conference, the Deputy Mayor of Athens, Tonia Kanellopoulou, announced details of a new animal welfare law concerning stray, street and unwanted dogs and cats. However, with the exception of one municipality in central Athens, it is not yet known whether this law has yet been widely implemented.

Repeated offers of help by WSPA and its member societies have only been partially acted on to date. The RSPCA, one of WSPA's largest member societies, is providing assistance to the Greek authorities in the form of a training and education programme. However, the eventual fate of any dogs that may be taken from the streets and temporarily put into shelters is still unclear.

Major General Peter Davies, WSPA's Director General, added, "The cruelty that often faces stray animals is one of the biggest challenges that we are up against. The global issue of unwanted animals is a social problem not only to the people of Athens, but for society as a whole."

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