



July 27, 2006

His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba
President of the Republic of Namibia
State House, Windhoek
NAMIBIA

Dear President Pohamba:

I am writing on behalf of the more than 9.5 million members and constituents of The Humane Society of the United States and its international arm, Humane Society International (HSUS/HSI), regarding the massive annual Cape fur seal hunt conducted in Namibia. The HSUS/HSI wrote the Namibian president in 2000 regarding the hunt, but received no reply. We hope your government will be more responsive.

The HSUS/HSI is aware that your government has issued a Cape fur seal hunt quota of 85,000 pups for 2006 – this is nearly 80% of the estimated/surveyed pup production for the season. Indeed, the hunting season (which was scheduled to start earlier this month) begins many months after the pupping season does, meaning much of the natural mortality (as high as 30%) that the seals face as pups will have already occurred by the time the hunters arrive on the rookeries. Thus a hunt quota of 80% of the initial pup production amounts, on paper at least, to a destruction of the entire remaining reproductive output for the year. Given the die-offs this population has experienced in previous years and the ever-increasing hunt quotas the government has issued since the 1990s, this kill level is obviously unsustainable and will inevitably result in a catastrophic drop in fur seal numbers in the next few years.

In 1994 this population suffered a massive die-off of 200,000 animals due to local oceanic anomalies, possibly the result of weather and ocean circulation pattern changes attributed to global warming. However, the quota for the hunt was not adjusted in any way to account for these losses, indicating that the management regime governing this hunt is neither science-based nor risk averse. In 2000, another die-off occurred, killing at least 300,000 animals, and again the response of the Namibian government was to be the opposite of precautionary – it extended the hunting season, allowing directed killing to add to the devastating unusual mortality the seals suffered that year.

Around the world, seals and sea lions have been suffering from epizootics of emergent diseases, often caused by species-bridging pathogens such as canine distemper virus. Organochlorine pollutants and heavy metals can depress the mammalian immune response; as levels of these contaminants continue to increase in the marine environment, it is likely that marine mammal epizootics will also increase in occurrence. This is far more likely to happen to the Cape fur seal population than others, as many of the animals are found within the DeBeers diamond mining region, which no doubt means contaminated run-off may be affecting the local fur seal food supply and thus the seals themselves. If an

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epizootic or another die-off strikes the Namibian fur seal population on top of the hunt, a disastrous decline could result.

Now is not the time for any nation to increase its quotas for marine wildlife hunts. Frankly investing heavily in a fur seal-based industry at this time seems shortsighted and unwise from an economic perspective as well as an ecological one. Nature is unpredictable and many local economies that have attempted to profit from wildlife hunts have driven themselves to poverty and the animals to extinction. The HSUS/HSI strongly urges your government to reduce the quota for Cape fur seals for the rest of this season and in future seasons, and to eventually phase out the hunt altogether, allowing the local economy to make an orderly transition to other sources of income.

Namibia has recently received much positive media attention, showcasing its beautiful landscapes and family-friendly atmosphere. It is difficult to reconcile this hospitable image with the unsustainable and inhumane slaughter of fur seals. This hunt does not comply with the criteria typically applied to local, small-scale, artisanal wildlife hunts that many conservationists support. It is cruelly conducted and its management goals – the extinction of the fur seal colonies – are archaic. This hunt and its practices are an anchor dragging Namibia backward as it tries to move into the 21st century. Please do not allow your country's positive image as a haven for those who care about the environment to be tarnished.

Thank you for your attention to our views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Naomi A. Rose, Ph.D.
Marine Mammal Scientist
Treaty Law, Oceans and Wildlife Protection

Cc: The Honorable Nahas Angula, Prime Minister
The Honorable Dr. Abraham Iyambo, Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources