

May 13, 2005

His Excellency Seok Hyun Hong
Ambassador to the United States
Republic of Korea
2450 Massachusetts Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

Dear Ambassador Hong:

I am writing in regard to a matter of some urgency.

For the past six weeks, Greenpeace activists from around the world have operated a “Whale Embassy” near the site of a proposed whale meat processing plant in Ulsan. The purpose of the Whale Embassy is to open a dialogue with local people about whaling, and to ask the Korean Government to cancel plans to build the factory and assure us that Korea will not resume commercial whaling.

The activists at the Whale Embassy have thus far enjoyed an excellent relationship with people in Ulsan, and have had visits from people with a wide range of backgrounds and interests. Greenpeace activists have shared tea and discussions with students, families, construction workers, Coast Guard officers, and fishermen, among others. The New Zealand Ambassador visited the Whale Embassy this week, and several other diplomats have expressed an interest in stopping by. The dialogue and free exchange of views made possible by the Whale Embassy has enriched both Ulsan and Greenpeace.

This week, the peaceful activists at the Whale Embassy were formally served an eviction notice. My understanding is that the threat of riot police was raised as well. I am deeply concerned for the safety of the Greenpeace activists in Ulsan, and ask you to intervene to ensure that the eviction does not go forward.

As you know, Ulsan, the City of Whales, will be hosting the meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in June, and the eyes of the world are upon Korea. Unfortunately, Korea’s ancient cultural linkage to whales is in jeopardy. According to the best available data, the population of minke whales in the East Sea, estimated to be less than 2000 individuals, is now at lower numbers than when commercial hunting was banned in 1985. This decline is linked to the bycatch trade, which is centered in Ulsan. Whereas countries without a trade in whale meat, such as Spain, Brazil, USA, Britain and Australia have annual accidental catches of whales in fishing nets of one to six whales per year, the number of whales caught in Korea is almost a hundred times greater than this.

We feel that by building a whale meat factory to process these whales, Korea is clearly endorsing an unsustainable industry, giving the green light to a Japanese government-encouraged plan to maintain and increase the whale meat trade in Korea. If you proceed with the construction of this plant, you will be showing tens of millions of people around the world that Korea has little regard for the health of the oceans, or the whales and dolphins that live in them.

Please do everything in your power to halt the eviction of the nonviolent activists at the Whale Embassy in Ulsan, and to protect their right to continue their dialogue with the Korean people about whaling. Further, I appeal to you to ensure that Korea votes to protect whales at the IWC meeting this year, thereby guaranteeing that future generations of Koreans will have a chance to see living whales in their waters.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

John Passacantando
Executive Director