



141A, High Street, Edenbridge, Kent TN8 5AX, England. Telephone: (01732) 866955 Fax: (01732) 866995
Email: iwcuk@iwcmail.demon.co.uk Website: www.iwctk9.co.uk

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DIFFICULT TIMES

Sadly, once again, I have to reflect upon the present severe global economic situation which seems to be affecting just about everybody. Perhaps worst of all, small charities like ourselves which totally rely on every pound that is donated to us.

As I said in the last newsletter, the weak pound had fallen from 100 Philippine pesos to the UK pound down to 77 to the pound. That was desperate enough but in February, when I was in the Philippines, it dropped to a low of 62, and has now levelled off at 65. This now means that where £1,000 equalled 100,000 pesos, it now only equals 65,000 pesos. The cost of running the centre for one month is as follows:

Centre staff salaries including two vets	58,000
Dog food	140,000
Veterinary supplies	121,000
General expenses - meals for personnel, office supplies electric, water, phone, centre and vehicle maintenance	115,000
Total monthly running costs	434,000

<i>434,000 pesos at 100 pesos to the pound</i>	=	<i>£4,340</i>
<i>434,000 pesos at 65 pesos to the pound</i>	=	<i>£6,676</i>

This means a monthly increase of £2,336. This is an increase we simply cannot cope with for very long.

Cost cutting is now a priority. In the past, I have been making four trips a year to the Philippines and sending out to all my very loyal supporters four newsletters a year. This year I have decided to only make three trips and only produce three newsletters, clearly this will make a saving. However, it is the newsletters that bring in the financial responses from you, our supporters - without which we could not carry on - and of course, the newsletters always show a profit over the cost of production.

Even though we will save on our costs, we cannot afford to lose the profit so as much as I do not like writing this, I'm forced to ask you again. Please will you give an extra pound or two to each of the three newsletters this year? Without this, I do not know how we will be able to carry on. Right now we have very close to 400 dogs in our rescue centre and we have to feed, bath and give unlimited veterinary care to each and every one of them. I know you would not want us to do anything less.

Every month our dog food bill alone, before the devaluation, was around £1,400. Now, as you can see, it has jumped to £2,153 and all our other expenses have gone the same way. My trust is that you will rally round to help us all you can. How I just wish I was a rich person and did not have to write like this - but sadly I am just an ordinary man living on a budget.

In all this doom and gloom, there is a bright side which is directly as a result of your past generosity. We do have the best animal welfare organisation (Animal Kingdom Foundation - AKF) in the Philippines - where all the animals receive the very best food, care and attention and totally first class veterinary care. I'm sure you will agree with me when I say this must continue to be so.

Whilst I know all the donations are intended to end the evil dog trade, we have taken in the odd cat or two and dogs which come to us having been abandoned or abused. Only today I received an email from someone in the Philippines who is going abroad. "Would we take his dog in?" We never turn an animal away from our door and we always let any pregnant female that we get on raids, have their puppies. Not all societies follow in this compassionate way and I would find it quite devastating if we could not continue in this way.

The fact that we have this good reputation, and the facilities to deal with all these animals matters, is paying off. There are a number of other animal welfare organisations in the Philippines. Some are newer than us, others have been there for a hundred years or more. However, the Philippine National Police (PNP) wanted an animal welfare organisation to work with them on two fronts. Firstly, to bring about the demise of the trade in dogs for human consumption and secondly, to eradicate rabies in the Philippines - they have chosen AKF.

These two projects are inextricably locked into one another. Eating dogs is now illegal; it can transmit rabies (if the dog has rabies) and it can certainly make people seriously ill. So now at long last the government recognises the risk to public health and has decided to do something about it. The agreement now between the PNP and AKF is to jointly work together on both of these two issues.

Big posters are now being put up (see the enclosed photo) with the names and telephone numbers of PNP and AKF. These posters will be in all police stations throughout the Philippines, plus local government offices, airports, sea ports, Mayors' offices and other public places. The posters are instructing the police to take action against dog traders and report their findings to the AKF. We will then jointly carry out raids on the dog traders. The posters also ask the public to report any suspicious incidents.

This is a big breakthrough for us. At last we are getting full government support with police support at the highest level. The police officer in charge is a four star General Mr Silverio D. Alarcio Jr. Second in charge is Colonel Antonio L. Gumiran. The signing of the agreement between myself as President of the AKF and the aforementioned police officers was all shown on nationwide television. I would love to be able to predict when we will finally end the dog trade but I can't. However, I do believe we are now on the right road.

Needless to say these new revelations will dramatically raise the AKF profile in the Philippines and more will be expected of us. The one thing we are now missing at the centre is an educational facility. Yes, we have been out and about on the educational trail but this has been mainly aimed at police stations and other government offices. What we need now is a purpose built building within the centre where school children can come and learn about responsible pet ownership and caring for animals - all animals, not just dogs.

Saving the animals is not enough. We need to reach the children when they are young, to teach them that animals are living beings just like ourselves who feel pain and joy, that they crave for love and attention and that throwing stones and hurting them is wrong. We also want to show the kids the joy that animals can give to humans.

Space at the centre is not a problem (sorry, I'm back to the old subject) - money is. We would need to build a place big enough to accommodate 50 children at a time. Facilities would be required such as projection and sound equipment, desks for the kids to sit at, lighting, toilets and a small kitchen. It is the Philippine culture to always give a soft drink, biscuits or something to eat to your visitors.

Judging by the other work we have carried out at the centre, I would say the costs would be in the region of £20,000. Should anybody, group or corporate, wish to know more about this proposal, please contact me. We would of course, treat this as an entirely separate project, setting up a separate bank account for it.

Even though money is tight, there was one area at the centre that required upgrading. The dogs needing a lot of veterinary supervision, either having just undergone surgery or suffering from some other non contagious complaint, were kept in the same area, next to the veterinary clinic, but in cages which I didn't like and that were difficult to keep clean. Now the cages are all gone as we have built individual cubicles with brick walls. The walls and floors are all tiled and have drainage points, which makes it much easier to keep them clean and sterile. Also, we put in a stainless steel sink unit with draining board, with a hot and cold water supply for washing food bowls allowing us to keep them separate from the normal food bowls. The area already has lots of natural ventilation, we also have new lighting and a ceiling fan. The area is now known as the High Dependency Unit (HDU).

Whilst I was there, we were able to rescue 15 dogs from a dog trader. Sadly, for legal reasons, we are not able to instigate a prosecution against these people but rest assured, we will be back to conduct another raid against this place and will have in our possession all that is required to make an arrest and we will prosecute the offenders. All 15 dogs were taken back to our centre. Sadly, within 15 minutes of being rescued, one dog tragically died due to the maltreatment at the hands of the dog trader. For the other 14 dogs, all are fine and doing well at our centre. Two females among this batch arrived already pregnant and on 7th March one of them blessed us with three beautiful babies - mother and offspring are doing just fine. Soon we will have some more lovely puppies.

I'm sorry for labouring on about the financial position but I feel it is only right to keep you informed. I'm sure you would not like to see us fail due to money matters. Truth is, we only have you to rely upon. Please don't worry, I'm sure we will survive but we do need that extra bit of help. I'm here only for the animals, and with you by my side, I know we can win. My best wishes to you all.



Charles Wartenberg

Founder, International Wildlife Coalition Trust

www.iwctk9.co.uk

*Charles Wartenberg, Founder
International Wildlife Coalition Trust*

*Charles Wartenberg, President
Animal Kingdom Foundation Inc*

Registered Office:
141a High Street,
Edenbridge, Kent TN8 5AX
Reg Charity No. 1035381

Registered Office:
11th Floor Heart Tower Cond
108 Valero St, Makati City, Philippines
Sec No. CN200250376