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04/10

LICENCE TO KILL

GET OUT OF JAIL FREE CARDS

COURTESY OF BAGUIO CITY PROSECUTORS

Baguio City is about 150 miles north of Manila and is the epicentre of the illegal dog trade and the eating of dog meat.

THIS IS NO GAME ... IF ONLY IT WAS. These are the cold hard facts. You will remember in November and December 2009 we, together with the police, successfully carried out raids on three restaurants that were selling dog meat dishes. This was the first time restaurants had ever been targeted. A total of nine people were arrested and all were charged under the new Anti Rabies Act RA9482, which carries much stiffer penalties - a fifty pound fine for each and every dog a trader is caught with, plus one to four years in jail. On 4th January 2010, the Baguio City prosecutors, one Maria Lourdes Esperanza D. Soriano and one Alfredo R. Centeno, dismissed the cases due to what they claim is *“lack of probable cause”*.

RESOLUTION NPS DOCKET No. 09-02516 4th January 2010

This document is, in the main, made up of three paragraphs. First the complaint laid out by the Philippine National Police (PNP) and ourselves Animal Kingdom Foundation (AKF). Second and third paragraphs by the defendants. This resolution NPS document only deals with one of the three raids carried out by the PNP and AKF, at the Comiles Eatery where five people were arrested and charged under the RA9482 Act. The defendants from the other two raids were released for similar reasons.

The PNP and AKF evidence shows that the Comiles Eatery were selling dog meat dishes; the AKF investigators had ordered two dog meat dishes, each containing dog heads. It was at this stage that the raid commenced and a total of 8.4 kilos of cooked dog meat was confiscated. No one ate any of these dishes and this evidence is in no way disputed by the defendants. In other words, the defendants accept that they were selling dog meat. Dog meat as defined by the National Meat Inspection Board is not acceptable for human consumption; further it is illegal to trade in dog meat.

The defendants case is, and I will abbreviate it:

- 1) The law is based on one whole dog (referred to as a quadruple animal) so the defendants should not be punished for selling dog meat dishes, which are only part of a dog.
- 2) The defendants say trading in dogs is illegal because dogs are the main carrier of rabies. Yes, dogs are the main carrier of rabies but this is not the only reason why it is illegal to trade in dogs for their meat.
- 3) The defendants claim that a rabid dog will have had any virus eliminated due to the cooking process. This is scientifically incorrect. A proven case of rabies infection occurred four years ago on the island of Negress when a four year old girl died of rabies through ingesting dog meat. We were involved in this case and we hold a copy of her death certificate which states that she died of rabies as a result of eating cooked dog meat.
- 4) Finally, respondents argued that while some people find eating dog meat repulsive and taboo, in this part of the country, eating dog meat is customary and socially accepted.

The prosecutors' statement in their resolution reads: ***“After a consideration of the arguments of the parties, the undersigned finds no probable cause to indict respondents for the crime charged ... In view of the foregoing premises, it is recommended that this case be dismissed for lack of probable cause.”***

To any reasonable thinking person, these people are 100 per cent guilty. They are the instigators of the crime - if they were not selling dog meat dishes in their restaurant, the dogs would not be killed in the first place. The second crime is not allowing us to have our day in court and allowing the Judge to decide who are the guilty ones.

We have now engaged the services of a Baguio lawyer that specialises in this kind of criminal case. Together with this new lawyer, we have travelled to Baguio for a meeting with the prosecutor Maria Lourdes Esperanza Soriano. Not surprisingly, Ms Soriano refused to reconsider this case, even though we were able to show her the death certificate of the four year old girl clearly stating the cause of death through ingesting the meat of a rabid dog. The problem is, whilst a record is kept of people dying of rabies, no record is kept of how the disease was contracted, ie. by a dog bite which is most common or by ingestion.

I find this whole case quite inconceivable. Why would two prominent people in the Philippine Justice System put their signatures to such a document and thus indicate their agreement with the behaviour of the defendants, even if it is socially acceptable in this region of the country? To me, it beggars belief. Further, they have agreed to ignore the scientific fact that cooking the meat will not kill off all dangerous viruses. It is not just rabies, E. coli, salmonella and plain old food poisoning can make people very ill and in some extreme cases, can cause death.

This kind of action by the prosecutors is highly likely to have an adverse effect on the perception of what the Philippines is like. Several times in the Philippines I have been accused of giving the country a bad name with regard our work in trying to eradicate the dog trade. This is not true. On an international scale, I have pointed out many times that it is a very small number of Filipinos that eat or trade in dogs for human consumption. Time and time again I have questioned why the Filipino government allows the approximate 10,000 or so people who engage in this illegal activity to continue with this very unacceptable practice, when around ninety million Filipinos **do not eat dogs - WHY?**

Now we have two very senior Filipino's working in the Justice Department putting their signatures to an official document. Yes, dictated by the defendants but signed off on as agreeing ... *"some people may find eating dog meat repulsive and taboo, in this part of the country however, eating dog meat is customary and socially acceptable"*. I did challenge the Prosecutor, Ms Soriano, on this point. She denied that she was in agreement with this statement. My question is, why did she accept that as being part of the reason not to prosecute the defendants and why then, did she put her signature to that document? My view is that a statement of this nature will do little to enhance the stature of the Philippines.

With all these problems, we must fight on. If we were to give in now we would be letting you all down - to say nothing of letting the dogs down. At this time, around 2,000 dogs per week are being killed to fill the dinner plates of those that still persist in eating mans best friend. The only course left open to us is to fight on. After consultation with our new Baguio lawyer, we have already made application to take this case to the High Court. It is going to be a long, hard fight and it is going to be expensive. I know from past experience that we can rely on you to see us through this difficult and, as I say, expensive time - we just cannot afford to lose. This doesn't mean that we won't continue our investigations as to where the dog traders are working; already we have several different locations under observation. It is only a matter of time before we strike again and hopefully the Prosecutors will see things from our point of view.

Now for some news from our rescue centre where we continue to make improvements in the way we accommodate the 393 dogs in our care. Just before I left to come home last time, we took in an eighteen month old male dog that we now call Happy. Our big challenge now is to make Happy feel happy, loved, wanted and at home - for Happy is blind in both eyes. Like so many other animals, Happy was being discarded by his owner; having a blind dog was too much trouble. Happy means everything to us and we all love him. We have had a new special big pen built to accommodate him for his disability with no post to bump into or steps to fall up or down. At first we will keep Happy on his own until he gets to know his new home. Then we will put one or perhaps two of our very gentle dogs in with him for company.

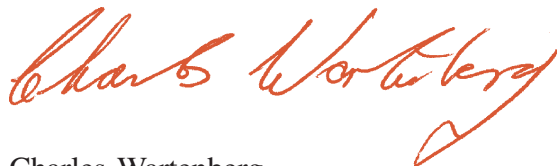
During my last trip I arranged with the police to stop and inspect pigs being transported. We cannot stop them going to slaughter but we can stop any kind of cruel transportation and ensure the animals have water to drink and have water sprayed on them to keep them cool. I'm sure this will make us some new friends but I expect them all to be pigs. I will update you next time.

The exchange rate is still very much out of our favour, with today's rate being only 69 pesos to the pound when once it was 100 to the pound. Although prices are also cheaper than here in England, costs are ever going upwards - especially dog food. You know what I do not like doing ... and I know I don't have to ask you to be generous with your donations. One thing you can always be certain of is that we will only use your money for the betterment of the dogs and a penny or two to help the pigs.

Let's end on a good note. I was invited to attend an Animal Welfare Awards event being held in the House of Lords on 11th March 2010. So I put on my best suit, shirt collar and tie and went along. To my great surprise my name was called out to receive an award for my work with Animal Kingdom Foundation in the Philippines. Nothing this grand has ever happened to me before but of course, it is not me that deserves the award - I could not do anything if it were not for you giving me your loyal support. I shall be taking the trophy to the Philippines on my next trip and it will sit in place of honour in the AKF office. Please be assured that I will make it known that without the support I get from you all this could not have happened. This award is to us all - by that I mean our rescued dogs as well, who show so much of their love to us for being truly rescued by AKF.

Please be sure to sign and post the protest card to the Philippine Ambassador. If you are wondering what pulutan is, it's the Filipino word for dog meat. Your support is vital to us - without you we would not be able to carry on. Together, I'm sure we'll win - we dare not contemplate otherwise.

Yours truly, in friendship with and for the animals,



Charles Wartenberg

Founder, International Wildlife Coalition Trust

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