

## News Release

# Otara Foundation appeals to President on behalf of rescued wild animals

The Otara Foundation has appealed to President Maithripala Sirisena to intervene to prevent wild animals rescued from forests being sent to zoos instead of being returned to the wild.

Otara Gunewardene has in a letter addressed to the President brought to his attention the case of four sloth bear cubs and a leopard cub now under the care of the Wildlife Conservation Department, and a request the Department had received that they be sent to the recently established zoo at Wagolla, Pinnawela.

The letter includes several annexures representing objections and protests raised by other likeminded groups and individuals on this matter, bringing to the President's notice the views of a coalition of wildlife experts and enthusiasts.

The Foundation points out that the new zoo at Pinnawela already has six leopards in captivity and questions its need for a seventh. It also notes that the Sri Lankan sloth bear is on the Red List of Endangered Species of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and that three of the bear cubs are currently at the Safari Park at Hambantota and one is at the Dehiwela zoo, despite protests by the veterinarians and officials of the Wildlife Department.

Elaborating on the appeal made to the President, Ms Gunewardene said: "We have to stop the practice of requesting animals from the wild to fill zoos. Every animal has the right just like us to live its life in freedom and should not be taken from its home and family to live a life in captivity for our entertainment. All efforts should be focused on conservation, not building more zoos to have more animals living in cages for the rest of their lives. These bears and leopards should be released back in the wild which is the responsibility of the Wildlife Department and I hope the right thing will be done for these beautiful animals that deserve a life to live in their natural habitat."

"It really is time that we start making an effort to make the changes needed to be a country that practices good animal welfare and respects all living beings, even those that don't have a voice to speak out for what they deserve. Many have suffered and many continue to suffer and I know there

are many like me who want to be a part of this change for a more compassionate Sri Lanka,” she added.

The Otara Foundation is headed by Otara Gunewardene and has on its board of directors Andorran investor and founder of the Bomosa Foundation Turi Mora, British milliner and fashion icon Stephen Jones, Swedish entrepreneur Karl Hoversjö and renowned lawyer Aritha Wickramanayake.

***(Ends)***