

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **State Attorney in Hannover halts legal proceedings against Hannover Zoo**

### **No cases of torture by elephant keepers found**

The State Attorney in Hannover, Germany, has cancelled legal proceedings filed by Peta against Hannover Zoo. After examining all the relevant documentation and the uncut video material, the State Attorney's office announced today that there was no case of animal maltreatment to be answered. The Zoo had contested the accusations from the start. "We are very pleased that we can finally issue a statement about these accusations and put the record straight on several counts," declared Zoo Director Andreas M. Casdorff at the press conference called today.

"In the course of investigations, no cases of injury, disturbed behaviour or aversion to the keepers could be found among our elephants. On the contrary: They confirmed a close relationship based on mutual trust."

Peta filed the accusations in April of 2017, basing their claims on single video scenes taken out of context that, on Peta's own admission, had been filmed in September and October of the previous year. These six-month-old recordings were passed to the television journal 'Report Mainz', and on 4 April 2017 'Report Mainz' broadcast the edited scenes, coinciding with the start of an extensive Peta campaign against the Zoo.

Peta claimed that, in Hannover, baby elephants were mistreated and hit with sharp elephant hooks to make them perform circus tricks for Zoo visitors' amusement – that, as a theme park Zoo, Hannover advertised with elephant shows to attract more visitors. The accusations and images provoked public outrage and death threats to Zoo staff.

Casdorff admitted that the Zoo, too, was disturbed by the effect of the edited sequences. As these few seconds of recording created an incomplete impression the Zoo immediately requested the entire, unedited video material from Peta and 'Report Mainz', assured the State Attorney's office of its full cooperation with the investigations and also, with the assistance of external independent experts, examined its entire elephant management policy and praxis.

The Zoo was only able to see the entire video material, almost five hours of recordings, months later in the course of the investigation. Even the State Attorney's office only received the uncut material in mid-June. Instead of the allegedly constant intimidation with

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elephant hooks, the films show hours of scenes with the herd and its keepers on the outdoor enclosure, and along with training the keepers can be seen stroking and rewarding their charges with treats.

“We’ve always emphasised, and did so to ‘Report Mainz’ as well, that there haven’t been any elephant shows at Hannover Zoo since 2013,” said Casdorff, making it clear: “We do not advertise with elephant shows; neither do we offer our visitors amusement. During the daily feeding times with keeper’s commentary we tell them about the elephants’ biology, how they are endangered in the wild, how their habitats are shrinking – and how one can help in saving this endangered species.”

## **Complete video material absolves Hannover Zoo**

The Zoo Director also questioned Peta’s avowed intention to expose abuses; instead of immediately publicising the so-called ‘shocking conditions’ in which elephants were kept in Hannover, Peta did not present the video material until half a year after it had been recorded, Casdorff noted, coinciding with the start of the summer season and the birth of three elephants, Casdorff maintained that Peta had launched a highly emotional campaign against the Zoo and elephant keeping in general, with images deliberately intended to shock, and misleading statements.

He pointed out that when one watches the brief scenes from the Peta video in their broader context it becomes plain that stringing them together in the edited clip and the ‘Report Mainz’ item manipulates the viewer’s perceptions: “In their full, uncut length, these scenes convey a completely different impression.”

## **Elephant management under close scrutiny**

Furthermore, in recent weeks the Zoo had carried out a critical examination of all aspects of its elephant management principles and praxis, from staff qualification through elephant training to working procedures. All veterinary documentation and daily animal keeping records were checked. Casdorff added: “Our investigations are also looking back through the previous years.” External professional assessors have also been involved; as soon as the allegations were made, professors at the Hannover University of Veterinary Medicine Foundation visited to form their own impressions of the herd. Elephant experts from the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) were also in Hannover to assess both the herd and the way keepers treated them.

Casdorff continued: “We are highly self-critical, and have already made changes. We’ve also taken on board ideas and suggestions from our discussions with EAZA and colleagues from other zoos that keep elephants. In-service staff training has been extended with international experts, and the elephant training plans reworked; from now on there will only be exercises with a clear veterinary, animal husbandry or educational foundation.

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Exercises designed to occupy the animals (behavioural enrichment) that could be misconstrued by an outside observer, will no longer be done.

In February of 2015 the Zoo had already decided to extend its elephant accommodation in 2019 as part of the 'Masterplan 2025' and has been drawing up detailed construction plans since the beginning of this year. Along with a significantly larger outdoor area, from 2021 there will be a generously-proportioned hall with plenty of space for the elephants to exercise and be occupied during the colder months. All new construction work will meet the requirements of keeping elephants in 'protected contact'.

## **Enthusing people for animals**

"It's been a very difficult time – the Zoo and its staff have been insulted and threatened, and you could sense the colleagues' uncertainty," said Zoo Director Casdorff. "We're glad that the truth has finally come out." He also explicitly thanked everyone who had stood by the Zoo at this time, and who in their letters, phone calls, and in person had so strongly expressed their attachment to the Zoo and its work: "Our purpose is to enthuse people for animals. We shall continue to do everything in our power to tell visitors about animals here in the Zoo and in the wild, and make a sustained contribution to their survival."