

Brussels, 9 December 2008

Portuguese zoos breach EU animal protection rules



Eurogroup for Animals has lodged a formal complaint with the European Commission in protest of the poor conditions animals are being kept in at Portuguese zoos. Under European legislation Portugal was obligated to have inspected and licensed all its zoos by April 2005 at the latest. Nearly four years later, 20% of Portuguese zoos are still unlicensed and thus operating illegally. Some of the zoos that are licensed do not respect legal requirements. An investigation by Eurogroup has uncovered many shortcomings that put both the animals and the public at risk.

As early as in 2002, Eurogroup funded a two year project helping the authorities with the categorisation of zoos and the training of inspectors, and the inactivity of the authorities is disappointing.

Problems found at Portuguese zoos vary from barren enclosures, to highly social animals being housed in isolation, and animals of different species being kept together inappropriately. Some animals have been seen to mutilate themselves and behave aggressively towards other animals.

In addition safety and security risks were identified for animals and visitors alike. Many animals are kept in enclosures that could easily be opened by the public. In one case a lemur monkey was found to be outside the enclosure as it was able to pass through the mesh.

Sonja Van Tichelen, director of Eurogroup for Animals, said: "The existence of zoos is questioned by many. If they don't provide any educational or conservation benefits and if they lead to animal suffering, they have no place in a modern society."

If Portugal fails to satisfactorily address the problems, it could be taken to the European Court of Justice.

Eurogroup is closely investigating the situation in other EU member states and has previously complained to the Commission over Spain's failure to inspect and licence its zoos. As a consequence an infringement procedure was started which reached the last step in September 2008, when Spain was sent a reasoned opinion. If the Commission is not satisfied with Spain's response, it will be taken to the European Court of Justice.

- ENDS -

For more information call Steven Blaakman, senior press officer at Eurogroup, on 0032 (0)27400823 or email him on s.blaakman@eurogroupforanimals.org. Outside office hours please call 0032 (0)475 731066.

Pictures showing the poor conditions present in Portuguese zoos are available on request.

Notes:

- Eurogroup for Animals represents animal protection organisations in nearly each of the European member states. Since it was launched in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the European Union to adopt higher legal standards of animal protection. For more information about Eurogroup, visit www.eurogroupforanimals.org.
- According to Portuguese authorities, there are 26 zoological parks in Portugal of which 20 are licensed and 6 not.
- Portugal is obligated to have inspected and licensed all zoos by April 2005 under EU Directive 1999/22/EC, as do all other EU member states.