

Wien, 10. Juni 2009

To the Austrian Minister of Justice

We, as representatives of the below named international animal advocacy groups, have been informed about the final reports from the police investigation into the animal advocacy movement in Austria. It seems that after 2 1/2 years of investigations with all technological means at the disposal of police, including phone tapping, email surveillance, vehicle tracking, concealed informers and 4 extensive electronic eavesdropping operations as well as 26 house searches of activists' homes and 7 animal groups' offices, there was no direct evidence of any criminal activity found. The sole evidence provided in the final reports consists of opinions expressed in private conversations and otherwise of investigative work and civil disobedience actions, which cannot be considered criminal.

The international community of the animal advocacy movement is very concerned that these police operations in Austria are leading to the criminalisation of legitimate campaigning practices. It is indeed very worrying, if Austria should follow up these final reports with charges against a whole section of the movement of being a criminal organisation according to section 278a of the penal code.

Animal advocacy NGOs in our country have for many years engaged in civil disobedience and undercover investigations to document cruelty, and yet nowhere has it been subjected to the kind of police investigation that has happened in Austria, let alone to criminal charges for such activities. Should Austria attempt to criminalize what is in other countries regarded as legitimate political activity, it will be widely seen as departing from the standards of tolerance expected today of liberal democracies.

We therefore would like to ask you as head of the Ministry of Justice in Austria to reconsider such a move. Any free democracy must allow space for protest and the free expression of dissent. A protest movement for such important issues as animal welfare and animal rights is an essential part of any modern society. The right to protest must be upheld and no person should be prosecuted without evidence of criminal wrongdoing. We are very concerned that in Austria, these basic principles of freedom, justice and democracy are being eroded.

Internationale NGOs, die den Offenen Brief an die Justizministerin unterstützen:

Aequo Animo, France
AgireOra Network, Italy
ALI - Animal Liberation Israel
Alliance for Animal Rights, Dublin, Ireland
Anima, Denmark
animal 2000, Germany
Animal Amnistie, France
Animal Liberation Victoria Inc., Australia
Animal Rights Hawai, USA
Animal Rights Lithuania
Animal Destiny, France
Anonymous, Israel
Artimiste Associazione di Promozione sociale Onlus
Association des Amis de la Douceur et de l'Harmonie, France
Association l' îlot des Lapins
Association la Foret de Lea, France
Association Végétarienne & Végétalienne d'Informations, France
Association Végétarienne de France
Associazione LaCincia Onlus, Italy
Bite Back, the Belgian/Dutch
Brighton Animal Action, Great Britain
Cahiers antispécistes, France
Chante la Vie: Sing the Life, France
Coalition Against Vivisection Belgium
Coalition Anti-Vivisection, France
Coalition to abolish the fur trade, Great Britain
Collectif Anti-Corrida de Fréjus (CAC83), France
Collectif Dois pour l'égalité, France
Collectif Libération Animale de Montpellier, France
Coloca Terre, France
CRAC Europe (Comité Radicalement Anti-Corrida Europe), France
Divieto d'accesso, Italy
Djurättsalliansen (Animal Rights Alliance), Sweden
DRinfo - nyhetsportal för djurvänner, Schweden
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Droits des Animaux, France
Eco Terra International
Ecoterra International
FARM, USA
For the Animals, Society for the assertion of animal rights, Slovenia
GlobeTransformer, France
Help the Strays, Switzerland
Heretic Club, France
I-Care Europe - Centro internazionale per le Alternative nella Ricerca e nella Didattica ONLUS
International Movement Against Bullfights, Spain
La Criée, France
Laus Animaliste ATRA
LEAL Lega Antivivisezionista Onlus, Italy
Lega Antivivisezionista, Italy
Loomade Nimel, Estonia
National Animal Rights Association, Ireland
National Anti Vivisection Campaign, New Zealand
New Zealand Vegetarian Society Inc
No Vivisezione, Italy
Offensiva Animalista, Lugano, Switzerland
OIKOS KAI BIOS
One struggle, Israel
Palwan Animal Welfare Association, Philippines
Patrimoine Nature et Vie, France
Pekarna-magdalenske mreie, Slovenia
Pense-bête, un réseau contre le spécisme, France
Politischer Arbeitskreis für Tierrechte in Europa, Düsseldorf, Germany
Pro Vieh, Germany
Progetto Vivere Vegan Onlus, Italy
Rassemblement Anti Chasse, France
Ruch na Rzecz Zwierząt - Viva! Poland
SAFE, The Voice for the Animals, New Zealand
Save our Friends Association, Sri Lanka
Save the Beagles Campaign, New Zealand
SHARAN, India
Sogrot, Israel
Stichting Dier en Recht (Animal and Law), Netherlands
Stowarzyszenie Empatia (Association Empathy), Poland
The Captive Animals' Protection Society, Great Britain
The Human League of Philadelphia, USA
The Protester, Great Britain
Uncaged, Great Britain
Varkens in Nood, Netherlands
Vegan Home, Italy
Wellington Animal Rights Network

