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PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLIC CALLS FOR AN END TO THE ABUSE OF DOLPHINS AT DOLPHIN LAGOON, SINGAPORE. ACRES CONSIDERS LEGAL ACTION.

SINGAPORE 22 OCTOBER – The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) has received strong public support for their ‘Suffering, not Smiling’ campaign. The campaign aims to end the abuse of dolphins held in captivity at Dolphin Lagoon, Sentosa, by Underwater World Singapore.

Through the month-long ‘Suffering, not Smiling’ campaign roadshow, which travelled to six venues in Singapore, ACRES has created the much needed awareness on the plight of dolphins in captivity. A total of 8399 people signed the petition, (at an average of one person signing the petition every minute) requesting that Underwater World Singapore:

- End the use of dolphins in animal shows at Dolphin Lagoon.
- End the petting and Swim-with-Dolphin sessions at Dolphin Lagoon.
- Stop the further imports of dolphins to the Dolphin Lagoon.
- Begin research on the rehabilitation of the Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins and eventually release the Indo-Pacific hump-backed dolphins from the Dolphin Lagoon, back into the wild.

This high number of petition signatures clearly shows a strong public support to end the abuse of dolphins. An additional seven organisations have also signed the petition. This brings the number of worldwide organisations, supporting this campaign to 44.

Haw Par Corporation Limited, who owns Underwater World Singapore, however, continues to ignore calls by ACRES for a roundtable discussion to resolve this issue. ACRES has sent three letters to them but has yet to receive a favourable response.

Louis Ng, biologist and President of ACRES, said: “We have tried our best to engage them in a dialogue. The public and worldwide organisations are all calling for an end to the abuse of dolphins. If Haw Par Corporation Limited continues to ignore our calls, then we will have no choice but to seek legal action.”

Section 289 of the Penal Code (Chapter 224, Statutes of the Republic of Singapore), states:

“Whoever knowingly or negligently omits to take such order with any animal in his possession as is sufficient to guard against any probable danger to human life, or any probable danger of grievous hurt from such animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 6 months, or with fine which may extend to \$1,000, or with both.”

There are serious risks involved in contact sessions with dolphins. Media reports and historic government records reveal a range of serious injuries caused to visitors by captive dolphins in interactive programs, including cuts, bruises, broken bones, bites and rakes. Since 1996, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society in United Kingdom, has also recorded several incidents, including bites and head butts. A case was also reported in Brazil where a sociable male bottlenose dolphin named Tiao, deliberately attacked and killed a man and injured several swimmers after apparently being harassed by people who wished to interact with him.

The contact sessions also exposes the participants to possible diseases from the dolphins. The United States National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has acknowledged that the potential exists for transmission of diseases between wild marine mammals and humans. Marine mammals are known to carry pathogens that can infect humans. As NMFS has noted, not only do bites from marine mammals carry a danger of infection, but there are a number of disease agents that are common to both humans and marine mammals and can be transmitted between them.

Contact sessions with dolphins are a probable danger to human life, or a clear probable danger of grievous hurt. While disease transmission and injuries caused to visitors by captive dolphins have yet to be reported at Dolphin Lagoon, it is clear that the potential exists. It is also simply not possible to guard against these dangers since dolphins, as with any wild animal, are unpredictable.

ACRES will also be considering taking legal action against Haw Par Corporation Limited under the Animals and Birds Act (Chapter 7). Section 42 provides for sanctions against cruelty to animals. If found guilty, the punishment is a fine or imprisonment.

Steph Song, local celebrity and star of drama series Heartlanders said: “Dolphins are not designed to be entertainers. They are amazing animals and seeing an amazing animal should not be as easy as buying a ticket to the movies; it devalues what they are. Keeping them in captivity is inhumane.”

Local celebrities Corrine Adrienne, Nadya Hutagalung, Wendy Jacobs and Adrian Pang are also supporting the ‘Suffering, not Smiling’ campaign.

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