EIA Calls on Japan to Urgently Close its Ivory Market
Government’s New Proposed Measures Fail to Protect Africa’s Elephants

Washington, D.C. – Japan’s announced plan to impose “tighter restrictions” on its ivory trade will not prevent widespread illegal ivory trade across Japan or the flow of illegal ivory exports to China, according to the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA).

Japan’s Ministry of Environment’s (MoE) proposal includes carbon dating of raw ivory tusks as a reinforcement measure to show the age of a tusk presented for registration predates the 1989 international ban on ivory trade by CITES (the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). The proposal fails to require proof of legality of such tusks, continuing a major loophole enacted in 1995 in Japan’s weak ivory controls, and supports the concept that an old tusk equals a legal tusk, which is false.

EIA president Allan Thornton said today that “Japan is throwing a lifeline to its ivory industry instead of banning its domestic trade to join global efforts to save Africa’s elephants from continued poaching. Rather than amending the raw tusks registration process, Japan should be ending it.”

The announcement by the MoE follows a two-year tusk registration campaign encouraging Japanese nationals to register their tusks in a large amnesty that put more elephant ivory onto the Japanese market. More than 3,400 raw tusks were legally registered in Japan between September 2017 and February 2019 alone. Japan has continued to refuse to require real proof of legality of tusks presented for legal registration, long accepting statements from third parties.

Amy Zets Croke, EIA’s senior wildlife campaigner said that “Year after year, Japan continues to take minute steps to ‘tighten ivory controls’ but nothing changes – its market continues to thrive. The United States and China have closed their ivory markets and the United Kingdom, Singapore, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan and others are in the process of ending domestic ivory trade. In advance of the 18th meeting of the Conference of 183 Parties to CITES, the African Elephant Coalition, representing 32 African nations, has specifically appealed to Japan to close its ivory market to protect their elephants from the trade in ivory.

Japan’s efforts to tighten its loose controls are insufficient in terms of policy reform and fail to demonstrate real international commitment to stopping the illegal trade in ivory and protecting Africa’s elephants.