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*Press Release*

**Quang Ninh illegal bear tourism: Flagrant disregard of the law**

*Ha Noi, 15 December 2010* – Recent investigation by a Korean TV station and surveillance by ENV investigators revealed that Ha Long bear farmers continue to engage in illegal exploitation and trade of bear bile, targeting Korean tour groups. This activity shows that bear bile business owners in Quang Ninh demonstrate no respect for the law, further undermining efforts by relevant authorities in dealing with illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam.

Over the past few years, bear farm tourism in Ha Long City has attracted a great deal of publicity. This illegal activity involves hundreds of Korean and other Asian tour groups visiting the farms each week, where they witness the extraction of bile from captive bears, taste bear bile wine, and buy bear bile and other bear products, which are then smuggled out of Vietnam when they leave the country in direct violation of the law.

Bears are listed under Group IB of Decree 32/ND-CP/2006 meaning the possession or sale of bears or products made from bears is illegal. Foreign tourists that purchase bear products and transport them across international borders are in violation of Vietnam’s international treaty obligations under CITES regulations.

ENV has been working to put an end to this illegal practice since 2007 when the bear bile tourism business in Quang Ninh was first discovered. Surveillance by ENV investigators has concluded that these business establishments receive dozens of buses full of Korean tourists each week. Most recently, in November 2010 after a Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) film was aired in Korea, field investigators observed Korean tour groups still entering Quang Ninh farms, confirming that it is “business as usual” for bear bile businessmen in Quang Ninh.

A news segment filmed in October 2010 by KBS Television shows Korean tourists visiting a farm and bile being extracted from a bear. Tourists are then shown purchasing bear bile to take back to Korea.

In October 2009, Environmental Police raided the Viet Thai Tourism bear farm and caught the Korean managers preparing to extract bile from a captive bear for a group of Korean tourists. Authorities later confiscated a total of six bears from two Quang Ninh businessmen and issued administrative punishment to the Viet Thai Company. However, these actions appear to have failed to deter bear bile business owners from further violations of the law.

“We highly appreciate the positive responses of Quang Ninh functional authorities in the case of the Viet Thai operation, however, these first steps haven’t been followed by more serious action to bring an end to this practice,” says Dung, ENV Co-director. “These bear bile businessmen are openly challenging the law. It is time that provincial authorities supported by relevant ministries step in and close this illegal form of business for once and for all.”
“The questions remain: when will stronger and long-awaited actions be taken and how can this illegal form of business continue so close to the heart of Vietnam’s most important tourism destination, Ha Long Bay?”

“This business casts a shadow over the image of Vietnam. It is time to demonstrate that we are serious about our efforts to protect bears and send a message to violators and the public that law is a requirement, not a suggestion, and it applies to all, including businessmen in Quang Ninh who may mistakenly believe that they are above the law,” Dung says.

ENV has been working to end bear farming and trade in Vietnam in partnership with other members of the Vietnam Bear Task Force, which also includes the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), the Animals Asia Foundation (AAF), Free the Bears (FTB) and Wildlife at Risk (WAR). ENV’s efforts focus on working with key decision-makers to strengthen policy and laws relating to the protection of bears, cooperation with law enforcement agencies to strengthen enforcement, and raising public awareness to reduce demand and consumption of bear bile and other bear products.

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Reference:
Latest Ha Long bear farm in Dec 2010 (KBS)
http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationfornatureVN#p/a/u/0/wSVkNjEE9Pl

Bear bile tourism operation in Ha Long (Dec 2009)
http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationfornatureVN#p/u/24/s45tk8OsjU
http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationfornatureVN#p/u/23/uj181-6i5bo

Bear webpage: http://thiennhien.org/CDBVG/index.php

Bear campaign TV Public Service Announcements
TCM alternatives PSA:
http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationfornatureVN#p/u/20/p6KUD2fVBU
Bear extinction guaranteed PSA:
http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationfornatureVN#p/u/44/gC6rD1PImzA
Say NO to bear bile PSA:
http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationfornatureVN#p/u/47/FgkkQ84kmnk
Pop star My Linh PSA:
http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationfornatureVN#p/u/48/7z93p8Vlbzo
Younger generation Say “No” PSA:
http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationfornatureVN#p/search/1/7R8DTJtCqtY
**About Education for Nature - Vietnam**

Education for Nature-Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam’s first non-governmental organization focused on conservation of nature and the environment through education. Our mission is to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about environmental issues of local, national and global significance, ranging from protection of wildlife and natural ecosystems to climate change. We employ creative and innovative strategies to influence attitudes and behavior, not only highlighting the need to protect Vietnam’s rich natural heritage and the living world around us, but also encouraging greater public participation in achieving this important and challenging task.

**ENV’s efforts to protect Vietnam’s endangered bears**

ENV has been working for more than five years to end bear farming and trade, carrying out a range of activities including investigations and surveys of bear farms, working with authorities to confiscate illegal bears, and combating consumer crimes such as selling bear bile and products made from bears, ENV’s legislative and policy arm works to build support amongst key government decision-makers and leaders to improve policy and strengthen legislation aimed at protecting Vietnam’s bears, and ensure that current laws are enforced effectively, while ENV’s public awareness and education unit carries out campaigns with the aim of reducing the consumption and use of bear bile and bear products. Recent campaigns have include airing public service announcements on TV and radio, campaigning through the media, billboards and advertising on buses, and public events throughout Vietnam hosted by ENV’s mobile awareness unit.