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Press release

The world's zoos come to Berlin

International experts meet for the 72nd WAZA Conference in Berlin

Zoo directors from more than 40 countries across five continents are currently gathered in Berlin with other international experts in environmental and species protection. The momentous topic under discussion is none less than the future of our planet.

In this age of extreme weather, species extinction, and the destruction of entire ecosystems, topics that were once side issues have become mainstream concerns with direct relevance for millions of people around the world. Sustainability, environmental education, climate protection and nature conservation are finally getting the attention they deserve. At the 72nd Annual Conference of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) in Berlin this year, delegates will discuss what contribution zoos and aquariums can and must make towards firmly anchoring these themes in our society. The conference motto is "Our time is now". The WAZA Conference is the biggest and most important event on the international zoo calendar.

More than 200 experts from countries as diverse as Australia, Brazil, Korea, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, South Africa and Vietnam are meeting in Berlin for the four-day conference from 15 to 19 October. In over 65 presentations and workshops, they will discuss numerous topics relating to species protection, animal keeping, marine pollution, the illegal trade in wild animals, and the problem of palm oil. Further items on the agenda are the influence that zoos can have on society, and how zoos can more effectively communicate their messages about species and environmental protection.

Each year, around 700 million people visit zoos and aquariums all over the world. This gives zoo visitors tremendous potential as "multipliers" of the message: they return home and talk to their friends, family, and acquaintances – people of all backgrounds, young and old, rich and poor. When zoos and aquariums use innovative and emotive communication tools, they can arouse the public's enthusiasm, educate people about the problems facing many different animals and their habitat, and help preserve biodiversity. Zoos and aquariums therefore bear a tremendous responsibility.

Experts including Erik Solheim, Executive Director of UN Environment, John Scanlon, Secretary-General of CITES, and Jon Paul Rodriguez, Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, will discuss pressing issues and set important targets. Objectives include optimising cooperation between WAZA members, setting standards that reflect current needs, and documenting the impact of zoos on nature and human societies.

Previous WAZA Conferences were held in India in 2014, in the United Arab Emirates in 2015, and in Mexico in 2016. Berlin's turn in 2017 has come around slightly earlier than originally planned. Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem is proud that Berlin can now welcome so many zoologists to this prestigious occasion. He spoke of his aspirations for the event during his opening remarks: "We hope to use this meeting to share examples of

best practices and set concrete goals for the future. We are very aware of the great responsibility we bear." Doug Cress, WAZA Chief Executive Officer, added, "Zoos and aquariums are at the forefront of conservation efforts, which is why we will use this platform to encourage as many of our member organisations as possible to become plastic-free and switch to certified sustainable palm oil by 2023." In his welcoming speech, the State of Berlin's Finance Senator, Matthias Kollatz-Ahnen, emphasised the progress that zoos and aquariums have made worldwide and referred to the constant search for improvement of the WAZA members.

The event also includes a programme of entertainments to give the guests a flavour of Berlin. The conference kicked off on Sunday evening with a reception in Aquarium Berlin; delegates will go on tours of both Tierpark Berlin and Zoo Berlin; and the event will finish with a "Trabi Safari" – a driving tour of the city in nostalgic little Trabant cars from the GDR era. After the event comes to a close on 19 October, the delegates can return home to Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo and London, to Chicago, Tel Aviv and Singapore, to New York City, Dubai and New Delhi, to Taipei, Moscow and Hong Kong, and start working to implement the important WAZA goals.