

## MOST URGENT

Shri Uddhav Thackeray  
Hon'ble Chief Minister  
Chief Minister's Office  
Government of Maharashtra  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Mantralaya  
Mumbai 400 032

26 March 2020

### **Re: Request for directives to be urgently issued for the inclusion of animal-feeding, animal rescue, and mobile veterinary services in the list of 'essential services' in the state of Maharashtra**

Dear Shri Thackeray Ji,

I'm writing from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India. We thank the Maharashtra government for including veterinary hospitals, animal care centres and pet shops in the list of essential services via the state government notification dated 25 March 2020 (**Annexure 1**) and are writing to request that this be immediately expanded to include animal feeding, animal rescue, and mobile veterinary services, as these make up necessary components of animal welfare and veterinary care. Without this inclusion, many "community" animals are likely to starve to death and suffer from untreated injuries and diseases during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Our office has been inundated with calls from animal feeders and rescuers and mobile veterinary service providers – including those with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – who are being prevented from carrying out their duty of feeding community animals such as dogs, cats, and birds by police officers and district administrations since the lockdown was declared by the union and state governments to fight COVID-19.

PETA India has an active and effective animal rescue team that works around the clock to help animals in distress. We and several other NGOs and animal rescuers are unfortunately facing resistance from the police in carrying out our work: feeding hungry animals and rescuing or treating those who are sick or injured. In the absence of these necessary services, there is a high likelihood that these animals will starve, suffer unaddressed infectious diseases – including those that could affect humans, like rabies – and eventually die.

We also draw your kind attention to an advisory issued by the Animal Welfare Board of India dated 23 March 2020 requesting that the chief secretaries of all states issue necessary directives to allow the feeding of community animals by animal welfare volunteers (**Annexure 2**). Furthermore, animal welfare workers are under instruction by

#### Affiliates:

- PETA Asia
- PETA Australia
- PETA Foundation (UK)
- PETA France
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA US

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Plot No 13, Community Centre  
Preet Vihar, New Delhi  
110 092

MP Maneka Gandhi to feed community animals to prevent starvation as stated in a letter by her dated 23 March 2020 (**Annexure 3**). A circular issued by the central Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying also on 23 March 2020 to the chief secretaries of all states also mandates that veterinary services and animal shelters be allowed to function as normal and that veterinary services be included in the list of “essential services” (**Annexure 4**).

Article 48A of the Constitution of India provides that “[t]he State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wild life of the country”. “The environment,” of course, includes animals. Moreover, Article 51A(g) of the Constitution mandates that it is the duty of every Indian citizen “to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures”.

The Honourable Supreme Court of India also gave exhaustive directions in its 2014 judgment issued in the matter of *Animal Welfare Board of India vs A Nagaraja & Ors*, stating that it is the duty of the government to enforce the provisions of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, and to ensure proper and effective compliance with the directions and declarations of the Supreme Court.

Should animals be left to die of hunger and thirst, it may amount to inflicting cruelty upon them under the law. We understand the health and safety concerns raised by experts and the government in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. On behalf of animal feeders, animal rescuers, and mobile veterinary service providers, we assure you that we will take strict precautions similar to those that would be taken by other essential service providers, or, in the case of veterinary assistance, human ambulance drivers and paramedics for public care.

In addition to including these services provided by NGOs and volunteers in the list of “essential services,” we kindly request that you direct district administrations and police forces to support and protect NGO workers, volunteers, and mobile veterinary service providers during the lockdown period. Please, may we also request that you forward us a copy of the directive issued in this regard for our information and perusal?

I can be reached at AsharM@petaindia.org or on +91 7045922028. I hope to hear from you soon. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Meet Ashar, Associate Manager of Emergency Response Team  
PETA India  
cc: Shri Ajoy Mehta, Chief Secretary, Government of Maharashtra

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