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Honorable Officials of Republic of Korea:

I commend revisions to the Korean Animal Protection Act of 1991 that clarify animal cruelty, impose stricter penalties, and attempt to minimize homeless animal populations. Lawmakers have acknowledged Korea's rise in animal guardianship with new rules to publicly leash dogs, affix ID tags, register animals and require their immunization.

I understand the modifications, to take effect January 27, 2008, direct a qualified Animal Protection Warden to investigate abuse cases and seize animals in harm's way. They also toughen fines for the inhumane killing of "owned" or stray animals.

Thank you for these positive steps. I strongly urge authorities to enforce the revised Animal Protection Law and fully prosecute those who violate it.

Still, I am worried about the law's dismissal of dog meat markets. While certain slaughter methods are deemed unacceptable, there is no outright ban on killing dogs for human consumption. Similarly, the extraction of bodily fluids from a living animal is classified as unlawful cruelty — but the law doesn't prohibit use of "liquefied" cats in elixirs thought to heal arthritis, neuralgia, and other human conditions.

Furthermore, existing laws remain vague and unenforceable. The Food Sanitation Law of 1984 considers soups or broths derived from dog (Boshintang) "disgusting foods." Yet this subjective law has done little to dissuade dog meat eateries. Korea's Livestock Product Sanitation and Inspection Act declassifies dogs as "livestock," stating they cannot be butchered under Ministry of Agriculture regulations. But Korea's Food and Drug Administration defines dog meat as a "natural product," thereby legitimizing dog slaughter for human ingestion.

These legal incongruities fail to safeguard dogs and cats from Korea's open markets. Publicized footage has shown dogs huddling in cramped, filth-encrusted cages. Many are systematically beaten to "tenderize" their tissue and expel adrenaline believed to enhance meat with a sexual aphrodisiac.

Dogs are strangled, bludgeoned with pipes and hammers, or electrocuted. They are submerged in boiling water and whirlpools to strip away fur. Blowtorches brown their skin. Some regain consciousness during processing. Butchers think dogs who endure intense terror yield softer, more profitable meat.

Cats, viewed as "nuisance animals," are pummeled to death in sacks or sometimes boiled alive in pressure cookers to produce "herbal" tonics. Images have spread over the Internet of stray cats cowering atop each other in small boxes, awaiting death at the hands of laughing workers.

Until efforts to legalize dog and cat meat are abandoned, these cruel practices will persist. I respectfully ask officials to work within their area of command to withdraw all language for hygienic control of dog meat and afford ALL dogs and cats immunity under "Pet Animals." Please enforce punishment for the slaughter and sale of dogs and cats for food or medicine.

Dogs and cats are companion animals, bred to trust and love humans. "Tradition" is no excuse. Many other customs judged too barbaric for modern civilization have been abolished. It is time to shut down the dog and cat meat trade for good.

Thank you for your attention to this sensitive issue,