

1 March 2024

Carlos Favaro
Minister of Agriculture
Government of Brazil

Dear Minister

Export of live cattle from Brazil to the Middle East

I am writing to urge you to halt the export of live cattle from Brazil to the Middle East. These exports involve extreme animal suffering both during the long journeys, which last around 19 days, and then during slaughter in the Middle East.

This inhumane trade recently received considerable publicity when the Al Kuwait livestock carrier stopped in Cape Town in South Africa en route from Brazil to the Middle East. People in Cape Town were alerted to the presence of the ship by the stench that blanketed the City of Cape Town on Monday morning 19th February. Conditions on board the ship must have been extremely poor for the smell to be so strong. Eye witness accounts describe the cattle as drooling and smattered with faeces, with thousands having already sunk into a morass of excrement.

We urge you to halt this cruel trade. Indeed, On 25 April 2023 the 25th Federal Civil Court of São Paulo ordered that no live animals should be exported from Brazil's ports. The Judge based his ruling on three separate elements:

- That welfare of the animals during the long sea journeys to the Middle East is very poor
- That slaughter practices in the Middle East would be illegal in Brazil
- That animals are sentient beings.

Welfare of the animals during the long sea journeys to the Middle East is very poor

The veterinarian who, at the request of the Court, inspected conditions on a livestock vessel moored in the port of Santos found:

- The immense amount of urine and excrement produced led to a large build-up of muck in the cattle pens and so to extremely slippery floors
- The ammonia on the floors was intense making it difficult to breathe
- Inadequate space resulted in the movement of the animals being seriously compromised; they are unable to rest or walk
- The way they are transported "subjects the animal to intimate contact with its waste and the waste of other animals"
- High temperatures and extreme humidity "that clearly compromise the welfare of the animals."

The veterinarian concluded: "the practice of maritime transport of animals over long distances is intrinsically and inherently related to the causation of cruelty, suffering, pain, indignity and corruption of animal welfare in various forms". On reading her report the Judge, Djalma Gomes, wrote that the conditions on the vessel "reveal a picture of total absence of animal welfare".

The veterinarian's account is backed up by a report published by Dr Lynn Simpson, an Australian veterinarian who accompanied around 50 shipments of animals from Australia to the Middle East.

The journeys from Australia to the Middle East are of similar length to those from Brazil and it seems likely that Brazilian cattle will suffer from similarly appalling conditions as those described by Dr Simpson.

Dr Simpson's report states that during the long sea journey animals often become enveloped in a faecal jacket – they are covered in faeces. This is highly unpleasant and unhygienic and makes it very difficult for animals to lose heat in hot weather.

She describes how some cattle develop leg abrasions from lying for days on the hard deck surface. In some cases, abrasions become deep enough to abrade the bones within the joint. These abrasions result in animals that cannot stand, and so cannot reach the feed and water troughs. As a result, they either die of dehydration or starvation or have to be euthanised.

Her report adds that:

- Malnutrition, even starvation is common as some animals do not recognise the pelleted feed provided on ships as being edible
- Heat stress is common in the crowded pens which have high stocking densities
- Many animals will experience thirst as the water troughs often become fouled with faecal matter.

Welfare at slaughter in the Middle East

Judge Gomes stressed that slaughter in the Middle East is inhumane and would be illegal if carried out in Brazil. He ruled that the difference in permitted slaughter methods “makes it impossible to export live animals to be slaughtered”.

Slaughter conditions in the Middle East are very poor and routinely ignore the international standards on welfare at slaughter of the World Organisation for Animal Health. For example, in Egypt and other countries slaughtermen routinely control cattle by severing their leg tendons with a knife. Often in this region a chain is tied round the rear leg of cattle. The fully conscious animal is then hoisted up, dangling upside-down from one back leg, ready for slaughter.

Many slaughtermen are too frightened to get close enough to cattle to perform one deep throat cut. Instead the slaughterman stays at arm's length and simply stabs the knife into the neck. The animal bellows in pain and distress and struggles powerfully against the rope which restrains it. Even after several such stabs, the animal remains standing while it slowly bleeds from the neck.

Status of animals as sentient beings under Brazilian Constitution

Judge Gomes pointed out that Article 225 of Brazil's Constitution prohibits practices that “subject animals to cruelty”. He argued that this implicitly recognises animals as sentient as there would be no need to protect them from cruelty if they were non-sentient.

The Judge stated: “animals are not things. They are sentient living beings, that is, individuals who feel hunger, thirst, pain, cold, anguish, fear. A dog is not a chair, an ox is not a sack of potatoes”. The Judge's recognition that animals are “sentient living beings” was an important factor in his ruling that live animals should not be exported from Brazil's ports.

Conclusion

In light of the extreme suffering involved in Brazil's live export trade, we urge Brazil to end this inhumane trade as a matter of urgency. Animals should be humanely slaughtered in Brazil with Brazil's exports being in the form of meat and carcasses.

Yours sincerely

Peter Stevenson

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