

Reprieve for bear rescue centre in Vietnam

January 16 2013



This picture provided by Animals Asia and taken on November 29, 2011 shows Asiatic black bears inside a cage at a private bear bile farm in Vietnam. A sanctuary for bears rescued from the bile trade which has been at the centre of a high-profile land dispute has been spared eviction by Vietnam's government, its director said.

A sanctuary for bears rescued from the Asian bile trade which has been at the centre of a high-profile land dispute has been spared eviction by Vietnam's government, its director said.

The \$2 million centre, in a national park, was told in July that it could face eviction, prompting a campaign backed by Ricky Gervais and other celebrities to save it from what staff allege was a corruption-driven land grab.

The centre, home to more than 100 animals saved from so-called bile farms, will be allowed to "continue the project to build the Tam Dao bear sanctuary" in northern Vietnam, according to a government notice posted online late Tuesday.

The decision was made at a meeting Monday chaired by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung.

Bile from the Asian [black bear](#) is believed to possess healing qualities in [traditional Chinese medicine](#), but animal rights groups decry the practice of confining the creatures in small cages to draw the liquid from their stomachs.

"This is great news, very unexpected, we are thrilled," Tuan Bendixsen, the Vietnam director of Animals Asia, which runs the centre, told AFP.

"We want to thank the government of Vietnam for helping us to save the bears. We are confident we can move ahead now," he added.

The centre feared for its future after receiving a letter in July from a vice defence minister forbidding any further expansion and ordering it to find a new location, arguing that its land area was of national strategic interest.

However, Animals Asia alleged that Tam Dao National Park director Do Dinh Tien had a personal stake in an ecotourism venture proposed for the park, and said that was the real reason behind the threatened eviction.

The Hong Kong-based organisation launched a public relations campaign to stop the eviction, with celebrities including British comedians Gervais and Stephen Fry tweeting their support for its work.

Officials must "seriously clarify the responsibilities of the director of Tam Dao [National Park](#)", the government's notice said, warning that "he would be seriously punished if violations are found".

Land disputes are common in communist Vietnam, where all land is owned by the state and usage rights are not always clear or protected. More than 70 percent of all public complaints lodged with authorities nationwide concern land.

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Citation: Reprieve for bear rescue centre in Vietnam (2013, January 16) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-reprieve-centre-vietnam.html>

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