

Elephant at center of animal rights campaign dies in Philippine zoo

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Before her death on Tuesday, the approximately 43-year-old elephant won the support of Catholic bishops, a global pop star and a Nobel laureate.

An elderly elephant has died in a Philippine zoo, an official said Wednesday, after a failed global campaign to relocate her to an animal

sanctuary.

Mali had been a popular attraction at Manila Zoo, where animal rights activists say she was kept for decades in "solitary confinement" in a concrete enclosure.

Before her death on Tuesday, the approximately 43-year-old elephant won the support of Catholic bishops, a global pop star and a Nobel laureate—all of whom pushed for her transfer on the grounds she had been mistreated.

"Mali was our prized possession and was the star attraction here at the Manila Zoo," Manila City Mayor Honey Lacuna told a news conference at the facility.

"It saddens me because she was part of our lives," she said, recalling how her parents took her to the zoo when she was a child.

Mali, who was brought from Sri Lanka to Manila when she was 11 months old, was the last surviving elephant at the zoo after her companion Shiva died in 1990, Lacuna said.

An autopsy found that Mali had [pancreatic cancer](#), zoo veterinarian Heinrich Domingo told reporters, rejecting accusations she had been neglected.

"We were her family," he said.

Social media users expressed sadness over Mali's death, while also criticizing the zoo and [government officials](#) for refusing to send her to an animal sanctuary.

"No more small enclosure for you. Run free Mali," Lemuel Bueno

posted on Facebook.

Another user said, "they killed her long before her physical death".

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) accused the zoo and the government of ignoring Mali's "clearly painful foot problems" and sentencing her to decades of torturous "solitary confinement".

"Mali the elephant died the same way she had lived for nearly 50 years: alone in a concrete pen at the Manila Zoo," the group said.

PETA began campaigning for Mali to be removed from the zoo in 2005, drawing support from British pop star Morrissey, animal welfare campaigner Jane Goodall, Nobel laureate in literature J.M. Coetzee and local bishops.

They signed letters to the Philippine government appealing for the elephant to be transferred to a Thailand sanctuary.

Lacuna defended the decision to keep Mali at Manila Zoo, saying she would not have been able to "survive outside" after so long in captivity.

She said the government would take Sri Lankan officials up on an offer to replace Mali when she died.

Mali's skeleton would eventually be displayed at the zoo museum, Lacuna said.

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