



PRESS RELEASE  
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For Immediate Release  
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**Statement by Dr. Luke Hunter, Executive Vice President of Panthera, on the International Forum for Tiger Conservation in St. Petersburg, Russia**

In recent weeks, Panthera, the world's largest cat conservation organization, has been asked why we will not attend the upcoming International Forum for Tiger Conservation in St. Petersburg, Russia. Panthera staff already has participated in several meetings with officials from the World Bank's Global Tiger Initiative (GTI), including meeting with World Bank President Robert Zoellick. During those sessions, we have urged the GTI to focus, first and foremost, on the most pressing need for tiger conservation, namely curtailing poaching in the wild.



Inhabiting less than 7% of its historic range, the tiger has experienced the greatest range collapse of any large cat species and it is now one of the most endangered large mammals on earth. Population numbers are dismal: from at least tens of thousands at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, current best estimates hover below 3,200 in the wild today.

It is an ironclad fact that humans are the number one threat to tigers. Humans cause up to 83% of tiger deaths, mostly by poaching, to feed a massive demand for tiger body parts in China and Southeast Asia.

Simply put, the single most effective way to reverse the decline in tiger populations is to stop people from killing tigers. There are left in the world today perhaps four dozen breeding tiger populations that have a chance to survive and persist into the future. If these populations were guaranteed absolute protection, we would save the tiger. Panthera's [\*Tigers Forever\*](#) program, which employs science-based measurement and monitoring of tiger and prey populations along with rigorous implementation of enforcement activities, has met with great success. We have demonstrated that the recipe for saving tigers is quite simple.

At Panthera, we are concerned that, instead of maintaining a blowtorch focus on the fundamental problem of tiger-killing, the St. Petersburg summit offers up a long shopping

list of activities with no clear measureable mandates that actually save tigers right here and now. While we agree that disparate issues such as educating local people about tigers and employing carbon emission allowances to preserve tiger habitats may help in the future when tiger populations are stabilized, Panthera fundamentally disagrees that there are many pieces of the puzzle when dealing with the *immediate* reversal of tiger decline. We simply do not have the time it will take for a schoolchild to grow up with an improved attitude towards tigers than her poacher father, or for the decades it will take for any carbon emissions program to produce results on the ground. The only way to stop the bleeding of tiger decline is to treat the wound directly. Carbon emission allowances do not stop bullets from penetrating into a tiger's brain. Once we have been successful stopping the killing, only then can we examine larger, overarching issues that will help tigers spread and prosper.

While we wish success for the St. Petersburg summit, we believe it will be a disaster for tiger conservation if all it achieves is to re-package the failing status quo under new labels and upbeat fanfare. Mr. Zoellick himself has said that stopping the killing of tigers is the single greatest priority. We call on the summit's organizers to elevate this issue to the pinnacle of the process and establish measureable goals that relate directly to immediate tiger survival and increases in tiger numbers. Panthera stands ready to assist any of the tiger range countries in achieving this goal. We also invite other international NGO's to join forces and help us in the jungles and forests around Asia where the real work of protecting tigers is taking place.

If you would like to schedule an interview with Dr. Hunter of Panthera, please contact Robert Ludke at 202-354-8235 or [rludke@pstrategies.com](mailto:rludke@pstrategies.com).

#### About Panthera

Panthera, founded in 2006, is the world's leading organization devoted exclusively to the conservation of wild cats and their ecosystems. Utilizing the expertise of the world's premier cat biologists, Panthera develops and implements global conservation strategies for the largest, most imperiled cats – tigers, lions, jaguars, and snow leopards. Representing the most comprehensive effort of its kind, Panthera works in partnership with local and international NGOs, scientific institutions, local communicates and governments. Visit <http://www.panthera.org/>

#### About Tigers Forever

Launched in 2006 after decades of continuing tiger declines, Tigers Forever is changing the face of tiger conservation. Tigers Forever makes a unique commitment to increase tiger numbers at key sites by at least 50% over a 10-year period by relentlessly attacking the most critical threats to tigers – poaching of tigers and their prey. Utilizing rigorous science to maintain constant vigilance on conservation efforts and on the tiger itself, this transformative program is the only one of its kind to guarantee success – the recovery of the wild tiger. Visit <http://www.tigersforever.org>