**Norwegian wildlife protection movement calls upon international community to help save the wolves in Norway**

**Norwegian animal organisation NOAH is organising demonstrations against the massive wolf culling in Norway this winter and the wolf extinction policy run by the Norwegian authorities. Demonstrations will take place on 20 January in Norway and on 19 January/20 January in other countries all over the world. More than 5000 protesters are expected to participate in the demonstrations in Norway.**

The government of Norway is running an extinction policy that is aimed at keeping the wolf population in Norway permanently at a critical level and as weak as possible. It has decided to cull altogether 42 wolves this winter of which more than half has already been killed. At the end of the hunting season, the majority of the wolf population in Norway will have been exterminated.

The head of NOAH, veterinarian Siri Martinsen says: "This large-scale culling is undertaken despite the fact that the wolf is categorized as critically endangered in Norway and is strictly protected by law. We consider the culling to be in breach of the Norwegian Biodiversity Act and the Bern Convention on the protection of wildlife that is legally binding to Norway. Both the Act and the Convention obligate Norway to ensure a viable wolf population on its territory. Also the legitimacy of the culling is questionable - research shows that the majority of the Norwegian people wish to have wolves in Norway."

This year’s culling is the worst that has been witnessed since the wolf was protected in Norway in 1973, because of its massive scale. The government decision to cull the majority of wolves in Norway lacks any scientific basis, neither is there any proof of necessity or justifiability of the culling. Widlife protection movement claims that the government decision is against the law. It is also the first time that wolves are hunted within the zone where they should enjoy strict protection.

Martinsen says: "As of 1 January, the hunt has focused on wiping out two wolf packs in the eastern part of Norway. Animals have been persecuted day and night, circled in by flag lines. Several of them have been wounded, causing the animals considerable suffering before they are killed. These packs have caused no damage to farmers. The government justifies the hunt with the need to protect "important public interests", which in fact are economic interests of hunters and landowners, and the interest not to have any wolves outside the wolf zone. This means that the wolf policy in Norway is in fact dominated by private business interests."

NOAH in cooperation with local wildlife protection organisations all over Europe and worldwide is now organizing demonstrations to protest against the extensive wolf culling and the wolf extinction policy in Norway on 19 and 20 January.

Martinsen says: "With these peaceful demonstrations the following message will be sent to Norwegian politicians: the current policy in Norway that is aimed at keeping wolves at the verge of extinction is not acceptable. We demand a turn towards a policy that prioritizes ecological concerns as soon as possible. Norway has failed to take care of its nature and sets a bad example for the rest of the world - we must stop this!"

Background information:

*The wolf population in Norway is part of a bigger Scandinavian wolf population that consist approximately of 430 wolves. Most of these wolves are found in Sweden. The Norwegian wolf population consists of 88-92 wolves, of which 55-57 are to be found solely on the Norwegian territory. The presence of the Scandinavian wolf population is limited to a relatively small area due to economic reasons, predominantly due to reindeer herding in the northern part of the countries. In Norway, the area for the protection of wolves (the so-called wolf zone) constitutes 5% of the country’s territory. (www.rovdata.no)*

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