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Minister Yair Shamir
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
Agricultural Center, Rishon-Lezion
P.O.Box 30, Beit-Dagan, Israel 50250

Dear Minister Shamir:

In light of efforts to bring the gambling-on-horse-racing industry to Israel, I am writing to make you aware of the U.S. experience with this industry. To introduce myself, I am a veterinarian in the state of New York, USA, with a lifetime experience of working with equine animals, including the galloping of race horses as an “exercise girl” in the mid-1970’s. I graduated *Summa cum Laude* from Harvard University in 1971, and was #1 in my class at Cornell’s Veterinary School, obtaining my Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree in 1980. I attach my curriculum vitae and addendum to further establish my credentials. I have served as an expert witness in reviewing numerous undercover investigations into racehorse abuse, submitting my affidavits to the prosecutors to substantiate the charges of animal cruelty brought against owners and trainers. The following description of the Thoroughbred racing industry serves as a caution for Israel to consider the overwhelming negatives in this inherently abusive industry before making a decision as to whether to permit it to gain a foothold in your country.

Because the major races with the most lucrative prizes are for two- and three-year old horses, immature colts and fillies are started in **demanding training regimens**, bearing the weight of their riders, at a mere one year of age. Note that any horse born between the dates of (for example) January 1 and December 31, 2014, will be considered a one-year old by January 1, 2015, even if he/she is only a few months old in reality. Thus, they are undergoing rigorous training drills while their musculoskeletal systems are still immature with open growth plates in their long limbs. In other forms of equine competition, (e.g. dressage and 3-day eventing,) the horses are permitted to mature to adulthood before undergoing serious training. Racehorses are barely adolescent and are overworked in their development to the point that they develop limb and hoof injuries, receiving drugs to mask the pain, thereby contributing to their future breakdowns as young athletes. The use of stinging whips drives these immature racers to produce speeds above their natural inclinations. They are pushed beyond their limits, causing bleeding in the lungs (potentially fatal), chronic ulcers, heart attacks, etc. It has been documented that **118 different drugs** have been used on racehorses, most of which are illegal and hazardous for use in humans, raising concerns about human health risks when these animals are disposed of through slaughter channels.

Because of the over-driving of these horses in their formative stages, coupled with the drugs that mask pain and cause them to further damage their joints, bones, tendons, and ligaments, over a thousand horses on USA tracks suffer **catastrophic “break-downs”** annually and are euthanized on the tracks. Proper care for these injuries requires lengthy rest periods to permit healing, but owners and trainers are not willing to allow a prolonged period in which the horse generates no income. This is an unacceptable mortality rate for any “sport.”

Overproduction is a critical problem in this industry: in order to have a sizeable number of young equine athletes from which to select the racers with sufficient talent to compete successfully, thousands must be produced, most of whom will not make it as racehorses. This overbreeding adds to our country’s unwanted horse population, resulting in horses being abandoned or neglected when their owners have no further use for them or interest in their perpetual care—and horses can live well into their thirties with proper husbandry. They therefore are sold at auction for slaughter, which is brutally cruel for equine animals who are “head-shy” instinctively, swinging their heads away from the “captive bolt” pneumatic device, which is supposed to stun them on the first try before they are shackled and hoisted by one hind limb for the slitting of the great vessels and death by exsanguination. Many are conscious throughout this frightening and painful process, and have suffered multiple agonizing blows to their skulls before death. The videos of their screams from the repeated blows are gut-wrenching.

An additional form of equine cruelty that accrues from this overproduction of foals is the **“nurse mare” industry**. Surrogate mares are bred to produce useless and unwanted foals to provide foster mothers for expensive foals whose mothers have rejected them or are sent to be bred again to stallions for the next valuable progeny. As the surrogate nurse mares are sent to racing stables to nourish the valuable foals, their own foals may be left to struggle with malnutrition, neglect, and abandonment. These unwanted by-product foals are never given an adequate nursing diet, nor are they given the medical attention that such youngsters require; their extreme neglect in such a formative period prevents them from ever attaining their genetic potential or proper health.

Since the Thoroughbred racing industry creates such a high volume of animals who are crippled while still young, or who are simply not fast enough to compete, the numbers of unwanted or “used up” animals is staggering. The only humane manner in which to manage such large numbers of animals who may not be suitable for any future use would be to establish **humane retirement homes**: but with animals who may live to their mid-30’s and require thousands of dollars annually to feed, house, and to medicate (especially in their long geriatric period,) there is a dearth of such facilities to humanely house the thousands of horses in need of such extended care. Too many end up in the care of self-proclaimed “rescue groups” that over time, deteriorate into grim equine hoarder cases.

Although I base these statements on my experience with the Thoroughbred industry as it exists in the United States, much of this evidence is found in other countries’ racing industries as well. If Israel bows to the pressure of those interests hoping to make fortunes on the wagering that forms the basis for this sport’s popularity, it opens the doors to a host of potential evils, not the least of which are corruption and egregious animal cruelty. If the United States and the

United Kingdom have been unable to regulate gambling in decades of trying to do so, how does Israel hope to do better?

As an equine specialist and a veterinarian with extensive credentials in the investigation of animal cruelty, I beg the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to reject all attempts to establish this form of cruelty and corruption in your country. I thank you for your attention in this matter, and offer myself as a resource for any inquiries you may have on this topic.

Sincerely,

Holly Cheever, DVM

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