Dear Friends,

First, thank you for your incredible support of WildlifeDirect this past year. As 2017 comes to a close, I wanted to share a story with you about how your support has helped change hearts, minds and laws to ensure that Africa’s incredible species endure forever.

On the 6th of October, I received a heartbreaking message from the Amboseli Trust for Elephants that the Kenyan authorities had shot and killed, Little Bull, a famous Amboseli Big Tusker, who they believed had killed a local peasant farmer.

“Big Tusker” is a term used to describe an African elephant whose tusks are so long they reach the ground - each tusk weighing as much as a person. By the time an elephant is large enough to be labeled a “big tusker” they are 40 to 50 years old and have reached their reproductive peak. There are fewer than twenty-five Big Tuskers left on earth. And each death is a loss of an iconic elephant with a name and personality. But it is also the loss of future generations of elephants with the strongest gene pool.

Because of his enormous size, and age, and because we knew him as a distinct personality, Little Bull’s death hit us all hard.

But his story is complicated. Loss of human life is unacceptable. Little Bull was a “problem” elephant and posed a danger to local communities when he raided local crops and wandered into agricultural areas. The expansion of commercial agricultural and the population increase in elephant landscapes across Africa are bringing people into conflict with elephants on a more frequent basis. And while Amboseli elephants are not usually aggressive, they can be bad-tempered and their large size makes them dangerous.

At WildlifeDirect, one of the questions that we grapple with on a daily basis is how do we help mitigate human-wildlife conflict like this to avoid loss of life and livelihoods and avoid injury to people who live alongside wildlife – while saving “problem” elephants from being killed?

As always, at WildlifeDirect, we look for pragmatic solutions to difficult problems. And we work in partnership with brilliant innovators, engineers, builders, and designers to develop appropriate solutions for problems just like this.

With Little Bull’s death, I couldn’t help thinking that it could have just as well have been Tim, the extraordinary Big Tusker that WildlifeDirect has worked hard to keep alive by having him radio-collared and tracked in partnership with the Kenya Wildlife Service, Save The Elephants and Big Life Foundation.

Tim is one of the last remaining great tuskers in Kenya.
But, like Little Bull, Tim is a “problem” elephant. He has a penchant for raiding farms, and ruining crops. His wanderings into agricultural areas and town disrupts livelihoods, and can cause injury and death. Now, however, with support from you, WildlifeDirect has funded Tim’s radio-collar which allows the authorities to track him and chase him away from farms and populated areas.

It is with support from you that we can help keep Tim alive and keep people in the local community safe from harm.

But we cannot put collars on every elephant, and human elephant conflict is escalating across Kenya and Africa.

At WildlifeDirect, we are doing three important things to address human-elephant conflict. First, through education and outreach we are reaching millions of Kenyans through our TV Series NTV Wild Talk which creates awareness about existing solutions. Secondly, we are scaling up our engagement with talented women who are affected by elephants by supporting enterprises that help them to value wildlife. Finally, we are working with brilliant innovators, builders, engineers and designers to develop appropriate solutions for people who live with wildlife. We support the Lion Lights project which has protected hundreds of pastoralist from lion attacks. Now we are looking for similar solutions that will allow elephants and people to live alongside each other in peace and safety.

This holiday season, please support our effort to raise $150,000 towards this vital work to stop the torture and killing of elephants in retaliation to conflict. These funds will help us further our education work, and test and deploy devices to keep elephants out of harm in the hardest hit areas of human elephant conflict.

Thank you,

Dr. Paula Kahumbu, O.G.W
Chief Executive Officer, WildlifeDirect

P.S. Please make a donation today to support this vital work, which will prevent further retaliatory killings of our beloved majestic elephants.