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David O. Wiebers, M.D.

March 4, 2008

The Honorable Robert M. Gates  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and its international arm, Humane Society International (HSI), I write to you once again concerning an instance of cruelty to animals and apparent misconduct by a member of our armed services in the Iraq war zone. A videotape widely circulated on the Internet during the last several days depicts a man, who appears to be a U.S. marine, tossing a yelping puppy over a precipice. We understand that the marine in the videotape is identifiable, and we therefore expect the Department of Defense to investigate and to take swift and appropriate disciplinary action.

This is the fourth letter I have written to you or to your predecessor Donald Rumsfeld concerning incidents of cruelty and other animal welfare issues arising from an American presence in Iraq. Although such incidents are rare, The HSUS believes that the absence of an explicit prohibition on cruelty to animals in the Universal Code of Military Justice is a serious deficit, and it is our intention to advance a proposal for its revision within the U.S. Congress. It is my hope that you will join me in supporting this humanitarian measure, one that will clarify and reinforce the commitment of our armed services to the principle that Americans in uniform should set the strongest possible example of good character.

I would also like to encourage you to take agency-wide steps to raise awareness of the relationship between cruelty to animals and socially maladapted behavior. Such instances of cruelty are objectionable in their own right, but they take on special urgency as we welcome American military personnel home from the war zone. While only a few incidents of this kind have come to light, we worry about the psychological stability of those who could perpetrate such vicious acts against the most vulnerable of creatures. I would be pleased to make available to you the full resources of The HSUS in crafting appropriate educational programs that serve this goal.

*Celebrating Animals, Confronting Cruelty*

The HSUS, representing over 10.5 million members and constituents worldwide, counts numerous military families amongst its members. We recognize that such incidents are not typical of the fine men and women who defend and protect our nation in both peace and wartime. From our perspective, that's all the more reason for decisive action to identify and address wrongdoing by those few whose misconduct reflects poorly upon the rest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Pacelle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wayne Pacelle  
President & CEO

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