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US animal welfare group vows to help local greyhounds

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According to the Municipal and Civic Affairs Bureau's animal control division, the Canidrome euthanises about 30 greyhounds each month

Grey2K USA, a greyhound welfare advocacy group from the United States, is joining the Macau Society for the Protection of Animals (ANIMA) in an effort to find a second life for greyhounds that are exported from Australia to the local Canidrome, where they are put to sleep once they are unable to race.

Charmaine Settle from the Board of Directors of Grey2K USA was recently in Macau to learn more about what goes on inside the

local Canidrome, which has sparked concern around the region, mainly in Hong Kong.

A July online petition calling for an end to greyhound racing in the territory gathered more than 5,000 signatures.

A Sunday Morning Post investigation published in June found that 383 healthy greyhounds were put to death at the Canidrome last year. Launched less than a month later, the online petition came, according to the Hong Kong daily, after a letter signed by 24 animal-welfare groups in China was sent to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard calling for an immediate halt to the export of greyhounds to Macau.

Now, the largest greyhound protection organisation in the US says it will keep a close eye on Macau in order to find a solution to help greyhounds that were imported into the territory. The goal is to "generate awareness" among the population to discontinue cruelty to greyhounds, Settle told the Macau Daily Times.

"One of the first things we want to do is to create awareness, because we really are confident that once people know it [the living conditions of greyhounds in Macau] they would want to stop it," she stressed.

"But you have to create this awareness, because there are a lot of people that don't know."

"That's what happens in the United States, once you create awareness of what goes on, people say 'no' and they stop going," Settle added.

After a short visit to Macau, Settle will go back to the United States and put hands to work for local greyhounds.

"We will talk with any animal society in the United States. We want them to help us to put some political pressure on the Australian government," she explained.

Grey2K USA has no connections in Australia. However, "all the animal groups in the US are



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connected, so we hope after we present the situation to them they will step in and help," she added.

'One-way death sentence'

Although it was a short visit, Settle spent much of her time inspecting the local Canidrome. "It's a one-way death sentence," she described.

"We went to the Canidrome to see the dogs. We have been told there are 700 dogs there now, that are let out twice a day and then they race until they're injured on the track or just not winning anymore and they die," Settle explained. "So I guess if Americans knew this they would feel very sad that the greyhounds of Macau are exploited and suffer and die for the sake of a bet. "They [the greyhounds] are never given a chance to be a pet or to be adopted in their life. That doesn't happen in the US because they are adopted," she added. "I would like to see regulations in Macau that will help protect greyhounds while they are racing and then try to set some adoption programme for them afterwards."

However, Settle is aware of the legal restrictions that make it almost impossible for greyhounds to be sent out of Macau to be adopted. The dogs are brought from Australia en masse to the local Canidrome, tucked in the northern part of the peninsula, and the lack of relevant laws makes it almost impossible for them to get out.

The dogs' race career is quite short, as their race life normally ends in three years. Choi U Fai, head of the Municipal and Civic Affairs Bureau's animal control division, had said that the Canidrome euthanises about 30 dogs each month.

Since there are no laws on infectious diseases and the greyhounds would have to stay in quarantine for 40 days in Hong Kong, it's quite difficult to send them back home, acknowledged the ANIMA director, Albano Martins.

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'It [the canidrome] was such a contrast from the strip, the pretty, the flashy and the fun. Its days are numbered. It looks tired and economically not doing well'

- Charmaine Settle



Grey2K is putting pressure on Canberra to halt greyhounds' exports from Australia to Macau

In a July interview with MDTimes, Martins said it was hard to keep the greyhounds in Macau, due to the size of the city and of its population.

That is why Grey2K is trying to solve the problem at the source and is putting pressure on Canberra to put a stop to greyhound exports from Australia to Macau.

"Because once they get here it's very difficult to get them quarantined and is so pricey to take them somewhere else. So the best solution is to stop them from coming," Settle pointed out.

"Grey2K US will assist ANIMA in whatever it thinks is appropriate for Macau. That's why I came to listen to what Albano believes the situation is and to assist them in that," she added.

'Old and weary'

Settle believes that Macau Canidrome's days are numbered.

"I actually understood that they don't make so much money compared to the gambling, casinos and slots.

'Born to race'

The subject of greyhound welfare was first covered by the MDTimes in 'Greyhound euthanasia sparks

With the glamour of Las Vegas feeling that we see here, I think what people want is the glamour scene and not the dogs running around a circuit in the dirt," she said

"As opposed to the [Cotai] strip area where everything is new and there is a buzz of activity and excitement, the Canidrome just looks old and weary."

Last year, the Macau Canidrome generated more than MOP 300 million in gross betting revenue. But, according to her experience with other dog tracks in the US, the local Canidrome is at the bottom of the standards chart.

"It just hurt my heart seeing the dogs. This is very run down. Compared to other canidromes I have seen, this one was just old. Nothing was looking good," Settle continued.

"It was such a contrast from the strip, the pretty, the flashy and the fun. Its days are numbered. It looks tired and economically not doing well."

Settle has no plans to come back to Macau anytime soon, but will continue to remain in close contact with ANIMA.

Grey2K was formed in March 2001 and is a non-profit organisation dedicated to passing stronger greyhound protection laws and ending the cruelty of dog racing, not only in the US but also worldwide. It is opposed to greyhound racing and believes it is cruel and inhumane as the dogs "endure abysmal confinement in cages day in and day out".

It helped to put an end to dog racing in Massachusetts through the ballot initiative process, and came forward with legislative bills to prohibit dog racing passed in Rhode Island and New Hampshire.

It has presented and passed legislation to restore greyhounds to anti-cruelty laws in New Hampshire and Florida. In 2009, it helped draft the bill that made dog racing in Guam illegal.

debate: Born to race' – an extensive article published on July 8, 2011.

Ten days later, Grey2K USA's director, Caryn Wood, sent a letter to our newspaper where it recalled that "greyhounds are valued only as long as they generate a profit".

According to the animal welfare association, greyhounds' post-racing welfare falls entirely to volunteer adoption groups "that work to place greyhounds in loving homes around the world".

"The situation in Macau is far worse," said the letter published by MDTimes on July 18, 2011.

"There is no way out for the Canidrome greyhounds, as they cannot be adopted and cannot leave Macau," it stressed.

Grey2K has expressed concerns about the lack of current animal welfare laws in Macau – a subject frequently raised by MDTimes since the law has been pending since 2008 – and the resulting impact on the greyhounds.