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## Include Animal Rights in Your National Constitution

It's time for all nations to revisit their constitutions and ensure that they serve and protect all species. Animals are an integral part of a country, along with its culture, heritage and environment. The constitution should set a sustainable path for generations to come that includes healthy forests, clean skies and a future where all species are treated with respect and dignity.

### Animal Awareness in Austria

In 2004 Austria's parliament gave overwhelming approval to legislation that makes the nation one of the world's toughest protectors of animal rights. The new anti-cruelty laws make it illegal for animal guardians to crop their dogs' ears or tails, raise their chickens in cages or keep exotic animals for circus acts. Violating these and other stipulations of the new legislation will net offenders heavy fines and possible seizure of their animals. Extreme cases of animal cruelty carry fines as high as 15,000 Euros (US\$18,000).

**Austria is taking the role of pioneer. This new law will give both producers and consumers a good feeling, and it lifts animal protection to the highest level internationally.**

— Wolfgang Schuessel, Austrian chancellor

The new legislation will include the appointment of an animal rights ombudsman to oversee the treatment of animals on farms and in zoos, circuses and pet shops. Chicken farmers who invested in new cages shortly before the legislation will have until 2020 to switch to free-range fencing.

### Charting a Course in Germany

In Germany the Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture is guiding the country to a pioneering role among European nations. In 2002 Germany added the words "and animals" so that their constitutional law now reads, "The state takes responsibility for protecting the natural foundations of life and animals in the interest of future generations."

The consequences of this change include:

- Prohibition against the conventional keeping of laying hens in battery cages from 2007 onwards.

## Creating Constitutions

World Animal Net (WAN) is an international organization representing over 1500 affiliated societies that launched its Constitution Project to facilitate the recognition of animals as sentient beings by including animal protection in international, national and regional constitutions and charters. WAN calls for:

1. The United Nations to create a charter for the protection of animals.
2. The Council of Europe to create a general convention covering animal ethics and animals in entertainment.
3. The European Union to take practical steps to implement its Animal Welfare treaty protocol.
4. All national governments to introduce animal welfare into their constitutions (if they haven't already done so).
5. All regional governments and town councils to do the same.

- Tighter restrictions on the use of animals for testing cosmetics and non-prescription drugs.
- Responsibility of farmers to provide their animals with room to move freely, with adequate lighting and temperature.
- A requirement for all people caring for animals for commercial purposes to provide proof of their knowledge and skill about animal husbandry.<sup>1</sup>

Germany's Animal Welfare Act states that everyone has to take responsibility for animal welfare, from farmers and animal guardians to researchers and consumers. The government's commitment extends to its neighbors, encouraging other European Union countries to follow suit.

### A Step Forward in Switzerland

In 2005 the Swiss parliament strengthened its animal welfare laws to protect the dignity and well-being of animals. The new law limits animal transportation to six hours from the loading point and bans the import of cat and dog skins, the castration of piglets without anesthetic (as of 2009) and any form of ritualistic slaughter.

The new legislation didn't go as far as Swiss Animal Protection, Switzerland's largest animal welfare organization, wanted, which was for the inclusion of legal representation in court, and provisions on dangerous dogs.

- Animal Aid: [www.animalaid.org.uk](http://www.animalaid.org.uk)
- Animal Legal Defense Fund: [www.aldf.org](http://www.aldf.org)
- Eurogroup for Animal Welfare: [www.eurogroupanimalwelfare.org](http://www.eurogroupanimalwelfare.org)
- European Parliament: [www.eurogroupanimalwelfare.org/intergroup/intergroup.htm](http://www.eurogroupanimalwelfare.org/intergroup/intergroup.htm)
- International Fund for Animal Welfare: [www.ifaw.org](http://www.ifaw.org)
- World Animal Net: [www.worldanimal.net/constitution.htm](http://www.worldanimal.net/constitution.htm)



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### Official Status in France

In 2005 France gave animals official status for the first time under the country's 200-year-old civil code. The move followed a report that recommended that animals be recognized as protected property, as living and sentient beings. In 2003 France passed a bill that added an Environmental Charter to its constitution, recognizing that: "The rise of humanity was made possible through the existence of natural resources and the balance of nature," and declaring that, "Every person has the duty to participate in the conservation and improvement of the environment."<sup>2</sup>