

Animal rights activists hopeful that Ireland will ban greyhound exports to Macau

The bell appears to be tolling for Asia's only dog racing track after 400 people stage a protest in Dublin against the export of greyhounds



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Animal rights group Anima joined an international protest of some 400 people outside the office of the Irish agriculture minister in Dublin on Thursday, seeking a ban on the export of greyhounds to Macau.

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They handed in a petition with over 300,000 signatures.

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Following the protest and a meeting with lawmakers, the president of Macau-based Anima, Albano Martins, said he was optimistic. "Officials are sensitive to this matter ... The Canidrome's days are numbered," he said. "If Ireland stops sending animals, the Canidrome in Macau will be forced to shut down in a few months' time."

At the end of last month, media reports said the Irish Department of Agriculture was considering a legal reform within this year which would allow the Irish Greyhound Board to prevent the export of dogs to countries with poor animal welfare standards.

Between early May and now, some 20 demonstrations against Asia's only greyhound track have been held in cities around the world, including London, Edinburgh, Rome and Sydney.

Public figures like comedian Ricky Gervais have urged the Irish government to stop the sale of greyhounds to China.



Following a ban by Australia at the end of last year, the Canidrome in Macau has reportedly received nine greyhounds from Ireland.

Controversy has grown stronger over the past weeks with rumours that a new batch of 24 dogs will be sent from Ireland to the former Portuguese enclave.

Thirty dogs killed a month at Macau's Canidrome and adoption programme a sham, claims animal rights activist

Other places, for instance mainland China, produce greyhounds, but they would have to be quarantined before they were admitted to Macau..

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ACTIVIST ALBANO MARTINS

According to Martins, underperforming or injured dogs are usually put down. Last year, the Macau activist estimated that more than 30 dogs were killed each month.

Injuries were very common, Martins noted, as the dogs raced around the clock "in an old track, not very large, in the evening , and without being sufficiently

warmed up to race."

Shipments of greyhounds help to replace the euthanised dogs. "They kill the animals and then they buy more dogs ...

Buy then kill, buy then kill," Martins said.

The Canidrome is operated by Macau (Yat Yuen) Canidrome Company. Casino tycoon Stanley Ho Hung-sun's fourth wife, lawmaker Angela Leong On-kei, is an executive director of the firm.

The Canidrome holds a licence until December. The government commissioned a study from the University of Macau on the greyhound operation. Officials are expected to look into the matter in the coming months.

Several airlines have stopped transporting racing greyhounds.

Last month, Irish animal rights activists launched a petition calling on German airline Lufthansa to stop transporting greyhounds to Macau through Hong Kong.