

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice - Expert Discussions on Crimes that Affect the Environment

Ben JANSE VAN RENSBURG, Chief, Enforcement Unit, CITES Secretariat

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Thematic Session 2: Combating Crimes that Affect the Environment

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

- I appreciate this opportunity to address you on behalf of the CITES Secretariat.
- As you have heard already from the CITES Secretary General yesterday, CITES - the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora - is a legally binding multilateral agreement that regulates international trade in over 38,000 species of wild animals and plants, including their parts and derivatives, to ensure that this trade is legal, sustainable, and traceable.
- My intervention will therefore focus on combatting wildlife crime, and in the context of CITES, wildlife crime refers not only to crimes that involve animals, but also crimes that involve plants.
- Today, industrial scale wildlife crime is driven by transnational organized crime groups. These crimes are serious and does not occur in isolation. They are often associated with other serious crimes, such as money laundering and tax evasion, fraud, violence and threats of violence, bribery, corruption, and others.
- The perpetrators involved in wildlife crime, see the animals and plants as just another commodity to illegally trade to make money for their criminal enterprises, with no regard for the devastating consequences of their acts on nature and people.

To combat wildlife crime:

- **First and foremost**, it must be treated as a serious crime. Legislation provides the basis for action to be taken, and the CITES Resolution on *Compliance and enforcement*, recommends that member States, or Parties as referred to under the Convention, make wildlife crime involving organized criminal groups a serious crime in accordance with the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.
- This is important, because the tools and mechanisms that exist to address serious and organized crimes, including those provided for the UN Conventions against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and Corruption (UNCAC), can often only be mobilized against the most serious crime types.

- Legislative provisions must therefore capacitate and enable authorities to deploy the same tools and techniques against wildlife crime, as those used against other serious domestic and transnational organized crimes, such as arms, drug, and human trafficking. Further, wildlife crime must be identified as a high priority crime for national law enforcement authorities to address, and accordingly incorporated in their work programmes.
- **Secondly**, no country, region or agency can combat wildlife crime alone. International collaboration and coordination are essential to addressing wildlife crime. To address criminal actors across the illegal trade chain, from range, to transit and destination States, collaboration and collective efforts must be further strengthened.
- **Thirdly**, responses to wildlife crime should be strengthened by undertaking systematic and thorough assessments concerning measures and activities being implemented at national level to combat these crimes, to enable addressing any gaps that may exist and directing limited resources to where they are most needed. This should not happen by chance, and must be based on structured and thorough process, provided for by tools such as the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) *Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit* and *ICWC Indicator Framework for Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime*, which you will hear more about in tomorrow's session.
- Ultimately, all tools at our disposal must be deployed to address wildlife crime, including formal requests for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, covert investigations, investigations into illicit financial flows and tax fraud, extraditions, undertaking risk assessments to develop wildlife crime specific risk profiles, data analyses to support intelligence driven law enforcement interventions, structured and thorough assessments to strengthen capacity, and others.
- Law enforcement responses must go beyond focusing on the lowest level of the trafficking chain – the poachers – and address those criminal actors managing and organizing the illicit activities.
- There are much more to say, but unfortunately time will not allow me to say more. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to these important expert discussions on crimes that affect the environment and how to combat it.

Thank you