

**32<sup>nd</sup> session of the CCPCJ, 22 May 2023**

**GENERAL DEBATE, statement by Minister Lee White CBE, Minister of Water, Forests, the Sea, and Environment of Gabon**

**(3 min. max)**

Thank you Chair.

Greetings to colleagues in Vienna and to everyone who is joining us online today.

It is a great pleasure for me to deliver this statement on behalf of Gabon. This session is a particularly important one to Gabon, and I would like to briefly explain why.

Excellencies,

Two years ago, on 17 May 2021, I joined you during the 30<sup>th</sup> session of this Commission to call for a global agreement to tackle illicit wildlife trafficking through an additional Protocol under the UNTOC, in light of the call launched by the Presidents of Gabon and Costa Rica.

, was the first country to ever call for such an agreement, having identified the clear and serious gaps in our current international legal framework.

To paraphrase His Excellency President Bongo Ondimba, “Given the scale of the risks to people and the planet, and the clear and serious gaps in our current international legal framework, we simply cannot stand by and watch wildlife continue to disappear, without strengthening our collective response”, is what President Ondimba said at the time.

On 20 May 2022, one year later, this Commission adopted a historic resolution, originally submitted by Angola, Kenya and Peru and co-sponsored by Gabon, among other States. Resolution 31/1 invited Member States to express their views on the current international legal framework to prevent and combat illicit wildlife trafficking, including the possible adoption of a new global agreement, in the form of an additional Protocol to the UNTOC.

In the coming days, UNODC will report back to this Commission on the process it followed and the views expressed by Member States thus far. We need to evaluate how effective the consultation process was, whether it was sufficient, and consider the responses received.

Dear colleagues, Gabon is taking every possible step to protect its precious biodiversity and invaluable natural resources, but we are painfully aware that we cannot successfully stop transnational, organised trafficking on our own.

On behalf of Gabon, I respectfully urge you to carefully consider this matter and encourage you to engage constructively in this critically important conversation about a potential new instrument on illicit wildlife trafficking.

Thank you Chair and thank you all for your attention.