

Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

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Statement by CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero

President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

I am honoured to address this august gathering, and I congratulate the Government of Japan and the UNODC for ensuring that this event could take place despite the pandemic that is impacting all Member States and their inhabitants.

We are living the terrible impacts of this pandemic in every sphere of our lives; and it has placed a renewed spotlight on the state of our relationship with the planet, highlighting the need to urgently address our unsustainable interactions with nature. This includes, of course, addressing the menace that is wildlife crime.

CITES is a legally binding multilateral agreement that sets rules for the international wildlife trade. The Convention regulates international trade in more than 38,000 species of wild animals and plants, including their parts and derivatives. Its purpose is to ensure that this trade is legal, sustainable and traceable.

All 183 Parties to CITES must take measures to enforce the Convention and trade in accordance with its rules. This includes to prohibit and penalize trade that violates these regulations.

The work of CITES Parties shows that regulating the trade and use of wildlife can benefit people, planet and prosperity, by conserving wild species while preserving the livelihoods of communities who rely on them.

However, this work can be seriously undermined by wildlife crime. The scale and nature of such crime has changed: today, we see significant involvement of transnational criminal groups driving industrial-scale illegal

operations. This often involves thousands of animals and plants, as evidenced by large seizures amounting to several tonnes.

Wildlife crime has serious economic, social and environmental impacts. It decimates wildlife populations and destroys habitats. It also degrades ecosystems and increases the risk that new zoonotic diseases might emerge.

This landmark Congress is being conducted under the theme of *Advancing crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law: towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda*. Ultimately, wildlife crime hinders progress toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Without thriving wildlife, Sustainable Development Goals 14 (On Life Below water) and 15 (On Life on Land) clearly cannot be achieved. However, we should consider that goals 1 (No Poverty) or 12 (Sustainable consumption and production) are also affected by the loss of wildlife.

The need to address wildlife crime as a serious, transnational organized crime is evident. No country or region can fight it alone. Further and strengthened international collaboration and coordination are essential. The same enforcement tools, techniques and penalties used to combat other serious crimes, such as trafficking in drugs or persons, must be deployed against wildlife crime.

The CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, UNODC, the World Bank and the World Customs Organization have joined forces under the auspices of the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime or ICCWC. We are working together to support States and to provide them with the tools, services, technical support and capacity building they need to stamp out wildlife crime.

Distinguished delegates, there is much more to be done. Discussing wildlife crime at this UN Crime Congress substantially adds to the momentum that is so critical to the success of our collective actions in fighting it.

Thank you and best wishes for a successful Congress to help build back better.