



"Working within CITES for the protection and conservation of species in international trade"

Conservation Groups Thrown Out of International Elephant Debate

Geneva, 17th August 2011, 9.30 am

In a shocking move that simply could not have been anticipated, some of the world's leading wildlife conservation organisations were this morning summarily expelled from an international meeting on wildlife conservation in Geneva, Switzerland by a 7 to 6 vote. This move was initiated by the government of Kuwait on behalf of the Asian region and was supported by Botswana, Iran, Kuwait, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica and Norway. The organizations were removed from deliberations concerning elephant conservation, the international trade in ivory, and concerns regarding China's increasing involvement in illegal ivory trade. There is a fear that the decision may set a precedent and that such methods may be used to exclude NGOs and civil society from participating in debates on other issues such as rhino and tiger trade.

The measure was approved at the 61st Standing Committee meeting of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), despite the strong objections of the UK and Kenya. Democratic Republic of Congo, Bulgaria, Ukraine, United States of America and Australia also voted against the action in an effort to support transparency and public participation. A simple majority in favour meant that the Species Survival Network (SSN), Born Free Foundation, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Humane Society International, Environmental Investigation Agency, Elephant Family, World Wildlife Fund, and numerous others, organisations with decades of experience working on the frontline of wildlife conservation and representing tens of millions of members of the public from around the world, are now sitting in the lobby of the CIGC (Centre International de Conférences Genève) unable to assist and participate in debates on which the future of wild elephants may depend.

Speaking on behalf of the SSN, its President, Will Travers said *"I am almost lost for words. This is a terrible precedent and jeopardises the effective conservation of not only elephants but potentially many other species if we are prevented from participating in other debates. The SSN, together with the American delegation nearly a decade ago successfully championed the participation of civil society representatives in Standing Committee meetings which, until this morning have been as open and transparent as possible, in line with UN principles. That achievement, on behalf of the citizens of the world, is now in jeopardy. Clearly, there is a co-ordinated initiative by some Parties to stifle open debate. This simply must not be allowed to happen."*

Conservation organisations of all persuasions have played an active and positive role in helping CITES achieve meaningful and positive results for species that are or may be threatened by

international trade. In addition, thanks to the generosity of the general public, they contribute tens of millions of dollars each year to conservation efforts in some of the world's most vulnerable places.

Travers concluded, "*This is a bleak day for principles that we all should hold dear - the principles of openness, transparency, accountability and responsibility. It is imperative that CITES, a Treaty to which more than 175 countries subscribe, addresses this matter as a high priority and ensures and enshrines the participation of individuals, organisations and experts who have only one thing in common, their desire to ensure the long-term, sustainable survival of life on earth.*"

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Editor's Notes:

CITES

The international trade in wild animals and plants is worth billions of dollars every year. Levels of exploitation and rates of wild capture can have a serious detrimental impact on the future survival of thousands of animal and plant species across the globe. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) is an international agreement between Governments, which provides varying levels of protection for species that are or may be in danger of extinction as a result of the impact of international trade. www.cites.org

SSN

The Species Survival Network (SSN), founded in 1992, is an international coalition of over eighty non-governmental organizations (NGOs) committed to the promotion, enhancement, and strict enforcement of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Through scientific and legal research, education and advocacy, the SSN is working to prevent over-exploitation of animals and plants due to international trade. www.ssn.org

The plight facing elephants

In 2009, over 20 tonnes of ivory was seized and countries have started to report localised extinctions of very vulnerable elephant populations. Since Standing Committee last met in March 2010, over 23 tonnes of ivory have been seized by customs and police agencies worldwide and so far this year at least 11.5 tonnes have been seized.

For further information please visit www.bloodyivory.org