

Press release from Benin, Co-chair of the African Elephant Coalition

Cotonou, Benin, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2016

### **AFRICAN COUNTRIES LAUNCH CAMPAIGN FOR GLOBAL IVORY TRADE BAN**

As Kenya prepares to burn 105 tonnes of ivory on 30<sup>th</sup> April – the largest destruction of ivory in Africa's history and seven times the size of any ivory stockpile destroyed so far – several countries, on behalf of the 27 member states in the African Elephant Coalition (AEC) of which Benin is co-chair, have launched an initiative to outlaw ivory sales under international law. A package of 5 complementary proposals to protect elephants has been submitted to CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). The strategy is a bold move to end the killing which has devastated elephant populations across Africa by securing a permanent ban on global ivory trade, the closure of all domestic markets for ivory and the destruction of ivory stockpiles worldwide.

The proposals have been submitted by today's deadline issued by CITES for consideration by the Conference of over 180 member States, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 24 September to 5 October this year.

#### **Quote of Benin, Co-Chair of the African Elephant Coalition**

"The crisis facing the African elephant is still very real, and calls for a global unity of purpose. It is critically important that CITES takes concerted action to ban international and domestic trade in ivory to save elephants from imminent extinction. We have to make a collective stand for the long-term survival of elephants throughout Africa in a united, cohesive mission" declares General Théophile KAKPO, Benin's Wildlife Director General.

The package of 5 complementary proposals, designed to strengthen and ensure the protection of elephants across Africa and Asia, concerns the following topics:

#### Listing all African Elephants in CITES Appendix I

All populations of African elephants were listed on CITES Appendix I in 1989, effectively banning international ivory trade. But the protection was weakened in 1997 and 2000 when populations in four countries (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe) were down-listed to Appendix II (a less endangered status) to allow two sales of ivory stockpiles to Japan and China in 1999 and 2008. The down-listing and stockpile sales did not slow poaching, but rather stimulated a renewed illegal trade in ivory in response to increasing demand, particularly after the second sale, once again threatening the species with extinction. This proposal recommends the transfer of the four populations in Appendix II back to Appendix

I of CITES, meaning that all elephants in Africa and Asia will enjoy the highest standard of protection under the Convention. International ivory trade will be prohibited by international law. Elephant populations are declining significantly across most of Africa. A universal listing in Appendix I will outlaw the ivory trade, simplify enforcement and send a clear message to the world of a global determination to halt the extinction of African elephants.

#### Closure of domestic markets for elephant ivory

This complements the Appendix I proposal by proposing CITES recommends that all governments close domestic markets for commercial trade in raw and worked ivory. Domestic trade maintains demand for ivory and creates opportunities to launder poached ivory, often under the guise that it is antique or legally acquired. Many countries, including China, have already announced measures to close down domestic markets. The proposal extends that approach globally.

#### Destroying ivory stockpiles

Seizures of poached ivory have swollen official ivory stockpiles held in range, transit and consumer countries. Many CITES countries have already held public destructions of stockpiles, sending a signal that ivory trade must be outlawed in order to save elephants. This proposal endorses stockpile destructions and commissions the CITES Secretariat to provide the best available technical guidance on stockpile inventories, audit, management and disposal, including DNA sampling to determine its origin.

#### Ending the Decision-Making Mechanism for legalizing trade in ivory

For nine years, CITES has discussed a Decision-Making Mechanism (DMM) to open up a system of legal international trade in ivory. There is no prospect of agreement by governments, while continuing the debate encourages poaching and stockpiling of ivory for future “legalised” trade. Economic analysis shows this would risk a runaway expansion of ivory trade with devastating effects on elephants. The proposal would end discussion of the DMM by CITES.

#### Prohibiting export of live African elephants

This proposal would end the export of African elephants outside their natural range, including export to zoos overseas. This would be consistent with findings from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) that the removal of African elephants from the wild for captive use has no direct benefit for their conservation and indeed disrupts wild populations, as well as leading to high rates of mortality and disease in captivity.

#### Correcting common misconceptions about elephants and ivory

Misconception: Legalising ivory trade will drive down prices by increasing the supply of ivory.

Correction: Economic analysis demonstrates that re-opening legal trade through a mechanism such as the DMM would risk a runaway expansion of ivory trade with potentially devastating effects on elephants. A crucial flaw at the heart of a DMM-based system for legal ivory trade is that if indeed it did reduce ivory prices, consumer demand for ivory could expand to even more unsustainable levels than at present, yet if prices do not drop, the incentive to poach elephants for ivory will remain high<sup>1</sup>. (For more information, see [“Roaming in a Minefield: the CITES Decision-Making Mechanism for Trade in Ivory”](#) by Alejandro Nadal.)

Misconception: Destroying ivory stockpiles increases scarcity of ivory and drives up prices.

Correction: In reality, the international market and supply chain for ivory is complex rather than simple<sup>2</sup>, with many intermediary players, and there are no good data on how it operates to control availability and prices for poachers, middlemen or consumers. Past experience indicates that destruction of ivory along with an international ban on trade can drive prices down. Following Kenya’s destruction of 12 tonnes of ivory in 1989 and the decision by CITES to ban international ivory trade, the price of ivory crashed.

Misconception: Proceeds from ivory sales provide significant benefits to conservation and local communities.

Correction: Economic justifications for ivory-derived benefits are lacking, but there is abundant evidence that wildlife-based tourism provides substantial income for national governments and local communities, with elephants providing a sizeable proportion of the "draw" for such tourism. One analysis<sup>3</sup> suggests that an elephant is worth almost 80 times more alive (for tourism) than dead (for its ivory). The purported value of ivory stockpiles never considers the costly side of storage: ivory deteriorates if not kept in a climate controlled environment, and requires detailed record-keeping and security to prevent theft (as has happened in several countries). These costs, added to the additional resources needed to protect elephants from poachers, who will always act as parasites on the back of a legal trade, make the net value of ivory as a commodity even lower. (For more information, see [“Dead or Alive? Valuing an elephant”](#).)

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## NOTES

- The African Elephant Coalition was established in 2008 in Bamako, Mali. It comprises 27 member countries from Africa united by a common goal: “a viable and healthy elephant population free of threats from international ivory trade.”
- The 27 member countries of the African Elephant Coalition include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Soudan, Chad, Togo and Uganda.
- [The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#) was established in 1973, entered into force in 1975, and accords varying degrees of protection to more than 35,000 species of animals and plants. Currently 182 countries are Parties to the Convention. The 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to CITES ([CITES CoP17](#)) will be held in Johannesburg from 24 September to 5 October 2016. The Conference meets every three years.

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<sup>1</sup> Nadal, A. (2014) *Roaming in a Minefield: the CITES Decision-Making Mechanism for Trade in Ivory*. Annamiticus, 7 July 2014. Accessible at: <http://annamiticus.com/2014/07/07/roaming-minefield-cites-decision-making-mechanism-trade-ivory/>

<sup>2</sup> Nadal, A. *ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> iWorry (2014) *Dead or Alive? Valuing an Elephant*. iWorry – David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, Nairobi, Kenya.