



## AFRICAN ELEPHANT COALITION

Website: [www.africanelephantcoalition.org](http://www.africanelephantcoalition.org)

Email: [info@africanelephantcoalition.org](mailto:info@africanelephantcoalition.org)

Telephone: +254 739 085 276

### **Press Release: Council of Elders of the 32-member African Elephant Coalition (AEC) calls on Japan to close its ivory market and support elephant protection**

The Council of Elders of the African Elephant Coalition (AEC) comprising 32 African countries and the majority of African elephant range states is calling on the government of Japan to close its ivory market, among the world's largest, and support stronger protection of Africa's elephants.

"We're calling on Japan to follow the example of China and close its domestic ivory market. We believe that doing so will strengthen Japan's international conservation image ahead of the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics", said Azizou El Hadj Issa, Chairman of the AEC's Council of Elders, in an appeal to Taro Kono, Japan's foreign minister to support the Coalition.

*17th June 2019, Porto Novo, Benin, West Africa* The AEC's Council of Elders has written to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Japan, Taro Kono, asking for assistance and collaboration to strengthen international measures in reducing the demand for elephant ivory "so that elephant tusks are no longer desirable objects".

The AEC has submitted several documents for the 18<sup>th</sup> [Conference of the Parties](#) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and is asking Japan to support their proposals to strengthen the protection of elephants\*.

Specifically, the AEC wants:

- All countries to follow China's example in closing their domestic ivory markets by strengthening a resolution [\(10.10\)](#) at the Conference of the Parties.
- To up-list all African elephants to [Appendix I](#), the strongest possible protection under CITES. Currently, elephants in Africa are split-listed with elephants in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe in [Appendix II](#), which allows trade under certain circumstances.

The AEC has long held the view that if elephants are to be fully protected it is imperative that they all be up-listed to Appendix I. The split-listing has led to confusion in consumer demand and resulted in a continued trade in ivory, which soared after the sale of ivory stockpiles from southern Africa to China and Japan in 2008. China closed its market in 2017, but Japan's ivory market remains one of the largest in the world, and

[substantial evidence exists](#) that ivory from Japan is being illegally exported to China in significant amounts, undermining the ban.

The Coalition is urging significant domestic ivory markets – particularly those of Japan and the European Union – to follow China’s example. The letter to **Minister Kono** appeals to Japan to close its ivory market, and is copied to the Ministers for Environment, **Yoshiaki Harada**, as well as the Economy, Trade and Industry, **Hiroshige Seko**, who are both responsible for policy-making on ivory trade, controls over domestic ivory trade and implementation of the ivory-related CITES resolution [\(10.10\)](#) in Japan. The Council believes that closing its ivory market “will strengthen Japan’s international conservation image ahead of the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics”.

The Chairman of the Council of Elders, **Azizou El Hadj Issa**, has also written to the Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs, **Wang Yi**, expressing gratitude for China’s “historic conservation policy in closing its domestic ivory market under the leadership of President Xi Jinping”, and asked China to support the AEC’s proposals.

The letters to both countries cite the [recently released](#) Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which highlights the urgency in protecting endangered species like elephants. The report found that exploitation of elephants in trade is accelerating their demise. The AEC’s Council of Elders warns that CITES has so far failed African elephants, the very symbol of the Convention.

Both letters stress that the AEC represents a unified voice of the majority of African elephant range states and aligns with the sentiment of the global public and most elephant scientists. A few African countries – led [by Botswana](#) – still want to exploit elephants for their ivory. However, the mission of the 32-country Coalition is to maintain a viable and healthy elephant population free of threats from international ivory trade.

*\* Due to the tragic events in Sri Lanka, where it was scheduled to take place in May/June 2019, the conference has been postponed to a date and location yet to be determined.*

\*\*\*

#### **Note for Editors:**

**African Elephant Coalition (AEC):** formalised in 2008 at a meeting in Mali, the AEC has grown to include 32 countries from East, West and Central Africa. It includes 28 of the 36 African elephant range states (78%) who speak as one voice in CITES on the conservation of wildlife.

**AEC Council of Elders description and membership:** The Council of Elders is composed of founding members of the Coalition, all highly respected authorities on elephant conservation who have held leadership positions in government in their respective countries. They include: Honorable **Azizou El Hadj Issa**, Benin (Chairman of the Council, Former Minister and Parliamentarian); Colonel Major **Bourama Niagate**, Mali (Knight of the National Order of Merit in France and Mali); **Fidelis Omeni**, Nigeria (former Assistant Director in the Ministry of Environment); **Daboulaye Ban-Ymary**, Chad (former Director of National Parks and Reserves); **Ernest Lamptey**, Ghana (former Manager in the Wildlife Division and CMS Scientific Councillor); **Marcellin Agnagna**, Republic of Congo (Officer of the Order of Merit of Republic of Congo, former Counsellor for Wildlife and Protected Areas); **Dr Perez Olindo**, Kenya (UNEP Global 500 Laureate and former Director, Kenya Wildlife Conservation and Management Department).

#### **Contact details of Council spokespeople:**

French - **Azizou El Hadj Issa**, Chairman of the Council of Elders

Tel: +229 97 19 0259

Email: [az\\_issa@yahoo.fr](mailto:az_issa@yahoo.fr)

English - **Fidelis Omeni**

Tel: +234 805 352 4527

Email: [fedelodomeni@yahoo.com](mailto:fedelodomeni@yahoo.com)