



Speech by Ivonne Higuero

Secretary General of CITES

Thank you, Mr President, it's an honour to address this distinguished gathering and I congratulate the Government of Germany on hosting this important event as part of its Financial Action Task Force presidency.

As you may know, 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.

The priorities of the CITES Secretariat are set by the CITES Conference of the Parties - or CoP. With regards to combatting wildlife crime, our Parties adopted a powerful suite of Decisions and Resolutions on enforcement matters at their last meeting in 2019. Some of these priorities are:

- Combatting money laundering, corruption and wildlife crime linked to the Internet;
- Promoting the use of forensic applications in the field of wildlife crime;
- Collecting and analysing annual illegal trade data to inform enforcement responses; and
- Strengthening collaboration and enhancing collective action.

We work with a broad range of partners to implement these activities and we actively pursue new partnership opportunities – it's clear that no one organization or body can combat wildlife crime alone. The CITES Secretariat is pleased that it has been able to work closely with the Financial Action Task Force, contributing to its various reports on addressing illicit financial flows from environmental crime. We also actively engage with the Egmont Centre of Financial Investigations Unit Excellence and Leadership or ECOFEL and, of course,

we continue to work in close collaboration with our partners as part of the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime. Let me elaborate more on this.

As we see from the changes that our kind hosts had to make to their excellent arrangements, we continue to face the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are living its terrible impacts in every sphere of our lives and it also continues to place a spotlight on the state of our relationship with the planet, highlighting the need to urgently address our unsustainable interactions with nature. This includes addressing the menace that is wildlife crime.

We welcome the extensive work conducted by the Financial Action Task Force on illicit financial flows from environmental crime, including illegal logging and wildlife trafficking. Considering the involvement of transnational organized crime groups in crimes affecting the environment, and the scale and nature of these crimes observed in recent years, the engagement by the Task Force and its members is timely. This global standard setting body on anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing is already shifting the needle by assisting our Parties to “follow the money” and take the profit out of these crimes.

We must ensure that these crimes are treated as serious, and that it becomes a high risk, low profit undertaking for the criminals involved. In the context of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), this is essential.

All 183 Parties to CITES (soon to be 184 with the accession of Andorra in January) 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.

But this work is seriously undermined by wildlife crime, which is a crime of greed driven by profit. Derivatives of many CITES-listed species, such as rosewood timber, totoaba swim bladders and rhino horn are high-value items and targeted by transnational organized crime groups. Driven by these groups, wildlife crime occurs at industrial scale, destroying ecosystems, people’s livelihoods, development opportunities, and driving species to extinction. This wildlife crime does not occur in isolation; the profits made from it often fuels corruption and other serious transnational organized crimes. Left unhindered, wildlife crime is a roadblock to progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Strengthening and expanding measures to address illicit financial flows from wildlife and other environmental crimes will help countries treat wildlife crime as a serious crime. There

are two major benefits in doing this: 1- we ensure that the criminals involved do not benefit from the proceeds of their crimes and 2 – the focus of law enforcement will shift from the lowest level of the trafficking chain – the poachers – to those at the top level. The ones who are actually managing the trafficking operations at the international level.

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. This is also recognized by CITES Parties in their resolution on *Compliance and enforcement*, which recommends that Parties:

- Make wildlife crime involving organized criminal groups a serious crime in accordance with the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime;
- implement national legislation to combat money laundering and facilitate asset forfeiture, stressing that effective prosecutions against money laundering linked to wildlife crime benefit from bringing together wildlife trade and money laundering expertise, including from financial intelligence units; and
- review and amend national legislation so that offences connected to wildlife crime are treated as predicate offences as defined in the UNTOC, for the purposes of domestic money-laundering offences, and are actionable under domestic proceeds of crime legislation.

The FATF community is a crucial partner in the fight against wildlife crime. We look forward to continuing to work with you to further strengthen and expand collaboration and interaction between CITES and FATF authorities. Your impactful reports have been supporting this expansion and we make them available to our Parties to increase awareness and encourage effective engagement with the financial authorities for the follow the money approach.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, UNODC, the World Bank and the World Customs Organization continue to work closely together under the auspices of the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime or ICCWC. This consortium is supporting States and provide them with the tools, services, technical assistance, and capacity building they need to stamp out wildlife crime. A key aspect of our collaboration is engaging in capacity building efforts to respond to and address money laundering and illicit financial flows from wildlife crime.

There is so much more to be done. Engaging in partnerships to bring together expertise in wildlife trade and money laundering is absolutely necessary. In this way we mobilize the responses required to address wildlife and other environmental crimes. By targeting illicit financial flows from these crimes, we can ensure that wildlife crime becomes a high-risk low profit undertaking.

Together and through persistence, we can overcome the challenges posed and destruction caused by wildlife crime and the criminal groups involved. I wish you all success with the important discussions on how the Task Force's work on illicit financial flows from environmental crimes can be further shaped, strengthened, and expanded, and from the CITES Secretariat side we are truly committed to continue our efforts in support of your work.

Thank you, Mr President, and we look forward to the outcomes of today's high-level conference.