

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT

ASSEMBLY

STATEMENT BY AUSTRALIA DURING THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT ON ILLEGAL WILDLIFE
TRADE: 26 JUNE 2014

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates and colleagues,

Illegal wildlife trade not only threatens the survival of species but is also linked to wider issues of concern such as national security, socio-economic development, rule of law and human health. As a global biodiversity hotspot with many unique species, Australia is a major target for wildlife smugglers. Recent seizures demonstrate that illegal wildlife trade threaten Australia's unique eco-systems, and particularly our reptiles and birds. We are also a transit point and destination country for a range of wildlife products, including ivory and rhino horn. One key to combatting this must be a strong stance towards the perpetrators and particularly the king pins that organise and profit most from the trade. In Australia penalties for wildlife crime include up to 10 years imprisonment and/or fines of up to AUD\$170,000 and AUD\$850,000 for corporations. We believe all States must strengthen and enforce penalties, working closely with Interpol and other international enforcement agencies.

But education and awareness raising activities are also fundamental and we see this as perhaps the most vital action we can take in overcoming barriers to action. Australia is working with auction houses to share information amongst buyers and sellers about the legal requirements for trade in species listed under CITES. We are also engaging with cruise ship operators to educate passengers about the consequences of the purchase and movement of wildlife and timber products. There are many other innovative awareness raising approaches being adopted world wide - particularly in major markets for the trade - that are worthy of all our support.

Madame Chair,

Australia supports the stronger role that UNEP is taking, consistent with its global mandate. It should take the lead on promoting the environmental dimension of this issue. But it is vital that this meeting, UNGA and the proposed, and laudable, UN Group of Friends on Poaching and Illicit Wildlife Trafficking build on and not duplicate existing initiatives. We must focus on mandate and comparative advantage. Outcomes reached through dialogue at this important meeting and elsewhere must be consistent with CITES and support its implementation. We must implement the 25 targeted actions of the London Conference.

To build and support international networks to address poaching and illegal trade, Australia is currently the Chair of the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (or CAWT). This is an important coalition of like-minded industry groups, governments and non-government organisations which aims to focus attention and resources on ending the illegal trade. Through CAWT and other regional and international fora we can increase attention and awareness. The momentum created by our meetings can be further built by the World Parks Congress in Sydney in November this year where a World Leadership Dialogue on illegal wildlife trade will be held.

Madame Chair,

It is of course vital that all this talk is translated to effective action. There are enormous challenges in the fight against illegal trade in wildlife but these challenges are surmountable through global collaboration.

Thank you. Asanti Sana.

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