



Congo Republic burns its entire stockpile of seized ivory

Burning ceremony takes place a day before announcement of African strategy for tackling wildlife crime

Brazzaville, 29 April -- The Government of Congo incinerated nearly five tons of poached ivory, fuelled by seized timber, in a strong demonstration of Africa's opposition to wildlife crime. The occasion was presided over by His Excellency Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo, and witnessed by, among others His Excellency Idris Debyltno, President of the Republic of Chad and Chair of the Economic Community of Central African States and His Excellency Daniel Ona Ondo the Prime Minister representing H.E The President of the Republic of Gabon. We as African leaders have resolved to deal with this problem decisively to salvage our natural heritage for the benefit of our citizens, said President Sassou. Earlier in the opening session for the International Conference on Illegal Exploitation and Illicit Trade in African wild flora and fauna, President Deby had articulated the gravity of the matter that brought down the elephants in his own country from 50,000 to only 5,000 within a short span. The Gabonese Prime Minister had also conveyed the commitment of President Bongo Ondimba to collaborate with their fellow Heads of State and Government in putting in place policies and institutions as well as engaging other regions and partners in this cause.

"This new evil is continuing to gain ground," said Henri Djombo, Congo's Minister of Forest Economy and Sustainable Development. Wildlife crime is "eroding and impoverishing the continent's biological resources from a social, economic and environmental standpoint."

The ceremony took place a day before the announcement of the first pan-African strategy to combat illicit trade in flora and fauna. A first strategy and action plan will be presented to the June 2015 African Union Summit to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The conference was organized by the Government of Congo, with support from the African Union (AU), the United Nations and other partners.

"This conference is Africa-driven. It complements earlier and ongoing initiatives and processes and shows strong determination to deal with this issue. With strong political

will, regional cooperation and sustainable partnerships, the continent will be in a position to unite and act before it is too late,” said Tumusiime Rhoda Peace, Commissioner of the African Union.

Wildlife trafficking devastates biodiversity and ecosystems, threatening the supply of food and freshwater and eroding livelihoods for millions of people in Africa. It also creates insecurity, fuelling conflicts and corruption, depriving countries of their assets, compromising the rule of law and dividing societies. Poaching and trafficking pose a direct threat to sustainable development efforts in Africa and elsewhere.

“Today’s destruction of confiscated ivory by the Congo will attract global, regional and national attention and should serve to raise further public awareness about the devastating impacts of illegal ivory trade and wildlife trafficking, and about the Congo’s, and the global community’s, collective determination to put an end to it.” said John E. Scanlon, Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

“Wildlife crime is effectively robbing people’s means of subsistence and countries’ economic wealth on a massive scale. As we pave the way for the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to make sure protecting biodiversity remains high on the agenda. The well-being of present and future generations depends on it,” said Nik Sekhran, the Director of Sustainable Development at UNDP.

“This burn is a symbolic statement from Africa that all ivory markets must be destroyed. Elephants are vital ecologically, a major source of livelihoods for local peoples, particularly in the tourism industry, and symbols for the culture of Africa,” said John Robinson, WCS Executive Vice President for Conservation and Science.

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Conference website: <http://www.conf-labff-brazza.org>

Follow the *Conference on Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa* on Tele-Congo and Canal+ Afrique (channel 145) at www.congo-site.com, @conf_labff_braz, @congositemaster, @UNEP, @UNDPAfrica, and @_AfricanUnion

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