

63rd General Assembly Of The CIC Affirms “Hunting Is Conservation”



Hunting is Conservation. So, what if we stopped hunting? That was the affirmation made and the question posed at the 63rd General Assembly of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) held in Brussels, Belgium, this past April 22. More than 400 people from 36 countries around the world came to participate in the discussions centered on the CIC's affirmation that "Hunting is Conservation." Among those in attendance were several representatives of the EU Commission as well as of the EU Directorate-General for the Environment and the EU Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development. High ranking representatives of several African governments and national wildlife authorities were also present; they came not only to address the members of the CIC, but to deliver their own message to members of the European Parliament just days before the assembly. The CIC General Assembly was preceded by a closed session meeting of actual and prospective CIC State Members, EU representatives and the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group with the CIC Executive Committee.

The CIC and Karl-Heinz Florenz, member of the European Parliament and President of the Parliamentarian Intergroup on Biodiversity, Hunting and Countryside, also organized a round table discussion in the heart of the European Parliament. You can watch this discussion on YouTube [here](#).

by Barbara Crown, Editor-in-Chief of The Hunting Report

The goal of the annual CIC General Assembly was to bring together wildlife and conservation stakeholders - from hunters to governments, to NGOs, scientists and academicians - to openly discuss sustainable-use policies in wildlife management, promote a better understanding of the practicalities of sustainable use versus preservationist approaches, and to promote better and transparent management at all levels - from the engagement of local villages to the international policies of governments and companies affecting conservation efforts and funding around the world. The information hand-outs to delegates and guests included the important IUCN briefing paper "Informing decisions on trophy hunting" (see also African Indaba Vol.14-2).

Outgoing CIC President Bernard Lozé commenced the opening events with a moment of silence remembering those killed and injured in the terrorist attacks in Brussels only the month before, then he reviewed the recent accomplishments and work of the CIC, including being recognized by the Dallas Safari Club this past January with the presentation of the 2015 Peter Hathaway Capstick Hunting Heritage Award. The award is given to individuals and organizations for achievements in sustained conservation of wildlife and habitat. Lozé pointed out that seven of the 10 past individuals honored with the award have been members of the CIC. Lozé went on to note the "unusually strong" attacks that had been launched against hunting, including the recent effort in the European Union to ban the import of hunting trophies. He credits the defeat of this initiative to the collective strength of the hunter-conservationist community.

The Assembly presented numerous speakers throughout the next two days, including government representatives from the European Union and various African nations. Karel Pinxten, Dean of European Court of Auditors, opened with welcoming remarks highlighting the three things hunters must continue doing to show the effectiveness of sustainable hunting and our commitment to conservation: responsible hunting practices, predator control and habitat improvement. Together, the three maintain biodiversity and prove that hunting is conservation. In today's world, Pinxten said, hunters must find a way to create trust and work with all stakeholders, including governments and the community of non-hunting animal and nature lovers because it will take all of them to maintain biodiversity.

Keynote speaker, Jyrki Katainen, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Jobs, Growth, Investment, and Competitiveness, also highlighted three things that hunters must practice: responsibility, sustainability and transparency. Well-regulated hunting, he said, delivers the mutual benefits of management and diversity of wildlife. And because hunting raises passions on both sides, hunters must find ways to cooperate successfully with non-consumptive use proponents. He specifically pointed to the sustainable hunting initiatives under the Birds Directive of the European Commission and the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores as examples of constructive dialogue between hunters and environmentalists. "We should work together on our common conservation goals," Pinxten said.

The panel discussion "What if we stop hunting?" followed the Opening Ceremony with a panel of five experts exploring the environmental, social and economic impacts of hunting bans. The speakers included Rick Capozza of the Roosevelt Wildlife Station in the US; Dr. Ali Kaka, CIC Ambassador to Africa from Kenya; Willy Pabst of Sango Ranch in Zimbabwe's Save Conservancy; Jurgen Tack, Director of Research European Landowners Organization and ELO CEO Landelijk Vlaanderen; and Seger van

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Voorst Tot Voorst, of Wildlife Estates (photo below).

Capozza started by pointing out the loss of ancient and deep running hunting heritages that span the globe and the explosion of predator/human conflicts that may occur in countries like the United States, where humans live in close proximity to already growing numbers of bears and wolves. "Hunting is a tool to manage predator populations and we will lose that if hunting is banned," Capozza said.

Pabst highlighted statistics from South Africa where 28 million hectares are currently under management for wildlife. Only 6 million of that are in National Parks. The remaining 22 million are under private ownership and hunting is a major component of income. If hunting were banned they would become unsustainable and 20 million animals would most likely disappear from them.

Between South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe alone, more than 55 million hectares of land depend solely on hunting income. A hunting ban would mean a loss of wildlife habitat the size of Germany and the United Kingdom put together, the loss of an estimated 35 million animals, and hundreds of thousands of people would lose their jobs, Pabst said.

Van Voorst discussed the hard costs to people and tax payers when game populations are not managed, including increases in vehicle collisions with wild game and the installations of grates and other obstacles to keep game out of certain areas. "Can the tax payer truly be expected to pay significant costs of overpopulations when another solution, hunting, exists and does not cost anything?" van Voorst asked.

Van Voorst, Tack and other panelists also pointed out the cascading effects of unmanaged game populations and the effects of over populations, such as the overgrazing of plants that insects and songbirds depend upon, the over population of predators that decimate one prey source after another until there is a total collapse, and the resulting and unavoidable loss of biodiversity in an area or entire region. The resulting changes to the habitats are being seen in Kenya today after 30 years of hunting bans, according to Dr. Kaka. The changes to habitats can be irreversible or take as many years to recover.

Fencing areas to contain game is not the answer either, as eventual over-population of grazers or predators will lead to starvation and collapse. Van Voorst observed that certain animal rightists prefer animals starve to death rather than they be hunted.

Tack said that many conservationists are still working with game population models that do not account for the realities of limited space, human encroachment and other factors of the modern world. But when those factors are plugged into the models, the loss of biodiversity due to loss of balance becomes obvious and use of hunting as a management tool proves sustainable. Under such models, he says, hunting is scientifically proven to be conservation.

Kaka added that hunting incentivizes local people to leave wild areas wild, and that upon removing those incentives people convert wild land to other uses that may or may not work in marginal areas where much of the coveted wilderness lies. People struggling to make a living see wildlife as a threat to

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crops or as competitors or threat to livestock, and they inevitably try to eliminate wildlife. In Kenya, Kaka said, not a single species has shown an increase in population since the hunting ban, but populations have begun to crash. In 1977 when the ministry banned hunting, Kenya had 166,000 elephant. By 1989 there were only 17,000 left. Wildlife must have a value to the local people and hunting income provides that. Thus hunting is conservation, stipulated Dr. Kaka.

Another session that captivated the entire assembly was the CIC Africa Initiative, featuring a panel from Africa, including Dr. Ali Kaka, CIC Ambassador to Africa; Chief Charumbira F. Z., President of the Chiefs Council of Zimbabwe; Prince Mupazviriho, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate of Zimbabwe; Barbara Thomson, Deputy Minister Environment Affairs of South Africa; Paul Zyambo, Director of Department of National Parks and Wildlife of Zambia; Tommy Nambahu, Deputy Minister Environment and Tourism of Namibia; and Gerhard Damm, President of Applied Sciences Division of CIC.

The CIC Africa Initiative is focused on creating a "Charter for Conservation, Habitat Protection and Hunting in Africa", demonstrating to Europe and North America that Africa has a conservation model that works and uses its landscapes and natural resources for the benefit of Africa's people and wildlife. The initiative's position is that conservation means the management of wildlife resources in such a way that it will support the use of that resource in perpetuity - in other words, sustainable use. The African conservation model gives value to landscapes and wildlife. The initiative also aims to develop a system to monitor the use of wildlife and habitat. With the right checks and balances it would allow for transparent adaptive management processes so it may become a conservation model that would benefit the entire continent.

Among the themes discussed by the African panelists was the view that Africans are only now coming to a level where they can benefit from the use of their natural resources after a long colonial period that blocked them from that. They expressed dismay that now people in northern nations attempt a form of neo-colonialism in the form of hunting and trophy import bans that again bar Africans from enjoying the benefits of their rich natural resources. Barbara Thomson from South Africa thanked the CIC Assembly for allowing her and her colleagues to put forward African conservation agendas in spite of the efforts by some in the so-called developed nations to dictate what should be done in Africa.

Tommy Nambahu of Namibia put the demands that African governments close hunting in perspective. He said Namibia has focused on community-based nature management programs that allow locals to benefit directly and substantially from landscapes and wildlife. Many of the anti-use activists sitting in comfortable offices in London, New York or Berlin do not understand that elected officials cannot take funds from education and other essential programs for people to support conservation. African people must see an economic return from conservation.

"We have come here to represent the rural people of our countries," said Paul Zyambo of Zambia. "They have not been consulted by those in other countries who wish to ban hunting. Yet they are the ones who depend on these resources, and they should not be managed from afar." He went on to say, "Good governance should be consultative and inclusive." Imposing bans from afar is not good governance.

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Mozambique's Minister of Land, Environment and Rural Development, Celso Ismael Correia also addressed the CIC Assembly in a surprise appearance. He told the participants that time is ticking and we cannot waste it talking about banning hunting. Instead we must focus our energies on fighting the scourge of organized poaching. "Organized poaching is an illegal activity conducted by the same people behind drug smuggling, human trafficking and general organized crime," he said. "Mozambique will always put human development first. Our biggest conservation challenge is funding. How do we take money from the needs of people to put it into conservation? This is why we support policies to make hunting professional and to use it to support human development."

Prince Mupazviriho of Zimbabwe followed saying that what is needed is a clear understanding by all of what is meant by community involvement in conservation. What mechanisms and structures must be in place? And how do we adapt them to meet the specific needs and circumstances the different countries? The communities on the ground are not recognized by parties at CITES, so they and the structures communities need, are overlooked.

Chief Charumbira of Zimbabwe echoed that, saying that the very people most affected by policies passed by CITES, foreign governments and companies such as airlines are never represented or consulted. "Poaching is the evidence of people feeling short changed," he said. "Why don't locals police the national parks? Because you have alienated them from the resources!" Chief Charumbira emphasized. Communities will not assist with conservation if they have no ownership stake in it. No decisions about wildlife should be made without including the communities affected by them, he concluded.

Other sessions included perspectives on the advantages of game meat over commercially produced meat by Professor Göran Ericsson and chef Gert Klötzke; partnerships between hunters and veterinarians by Dr. Bernard Vallat; global game health by Professor Torsten Mörner and Janis Baumanis; management issues in the transnational Carpathian ecosystem with Frans Schepers of Rewilding Europe, Wanda Olech of Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Professor Dr. Ovidiu Ionescu, Alexandra Sallay-Mosoi and Tamás Papp; and the Working Group Artemis on women in hunting with Dr. Soňa Supeková, Professor Dr. Mary Stange, Jaana Puhakka and Hannele Pyykkö. A side meeting on migratory birds explored issues of intervention with a focus on woodcock management and the conservation of threatened waterbirds in Eurasia.

The CIC General Assembly also served as an informal discussion forum to hammer out an initiative for the "Establishment of a Rural Communities Committee" at the CITES Conference in September this year. Several African nations co-sponsored this Zambian proposal as a consequence.

One session that attracted much attention was "Hunting Bans must be Banned!" Gaël de Rotalier of the European Commission Environment Directorate-General presented information on a proposed EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking. He explained that the plan was a step towards a comprehensive policy on trophy importations and not the ban that was proposed by a handful of individual MEPs that failed to meet the required number of signatures. Rotalier explained the proposal focuses on CITES listed species only and is a two-page document offering "guiding principles." Those principles aim to ensure that a trophy was taken legally, in a sustainable manner, and with the involvement and benefit of

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the local communities.

However, other panelists argued that the requirements of the proposal are in fact overcomplicating, duplicating or superseding requirements already in place by CITES and in the EU. Also, they questioned the need to focus so much additional regulation on the tiny percentage of trade that is composed of already amply documented hunting trophies while smuggling of poached wildlife runs rampant. One speaker said no matter what governance deficiencies there may be in some hunting countries, the proposed EU requirements are akin to using a sledge hammer to kill a mosquito.

During the closing ceremony, CIC President Bernard Lozé (France) announced that he was stepping down after completing six years of service in this office. The CIC Vice Presidents named George Aman (Switzerland) as acting president until the next formal election at the 2017 CIC General Assembly. By unanimous vote Bernard Lozé was given the title Honorary President of the CIC. The upcoming 64th CIC General Assembly in April 2017 will be celebrated in Montreux and hosted by the CIC Swiss Delegation. See you there!