

CITES: Keep Calm And Let Africa Speak

The International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, CIC, sponsored two high-level panel discussions and press conferences on 24th and 28th September during the 17th Conference of the Parties of CITES. Initially CIC planned only one press conference, but due to demand by the Africa Ministers present in the first meeting and the interest generated, a second event was scheduled.

Three African environment portfolio ministers, The Honorable Edith Edna Molewa, Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs (South Africa), The Honorable Pohamba Shifeta, Minister of Environment and Tourism (Namibia), and The Honorable Oppah Chamu Zvipane Muchinguri, Stephen Mwansa, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Tourism & Arts (Zambia), Prince Mupazviriho Chiwewete, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Environment Water and Climate (Zimbabwe), Shonisani Munzhedzi, Deputy Director-General: Biodiversity and Conservation of the Department of Environmental Affairs (South Africa), Willem Wijnstekers, former Secretary General of CITES and Deputy President Division Policy & Law of the CIC International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (The Netherlands) and Wilfried Pabst, owner of Sango Conservancy & Lodge within Savé Valley Conservancy (Zimbabwe) formed an impressive panel. With ingrained authority the panelists addressed the topic “Keep Calm and Let Africa Speak” and took questions and comments from around 100 guests and journalists from around the world in the two meetings.

The discussions and interactions with the plenum was moderated with distinction by Dr. Ali A. Kaka, Africa Regional Councilor for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The participating journalists packed the press room to hear firsthand the views of the African representatives on the proposals being submitted to and discussed at COP 17. It soon became clear that the panelists considered many of the proposals to be primarily driven either by African States with very poor conservation results or by non-African states which have little or no wildlife of relevance to the proposals up for decision by the voting delegates at CITES.

Clearly aggrieved at many suggestions on which they were not consulted as range nations, and/or on which their views based on successful conservation models were not taken with the seriousness they deserved the panelists did not mince words and spoke candidly.

The audience was accorded ample time to ask questions and make observations. Keen observers noted that there was widespread support for the sentiments of the panelists. Questions at some of the panelists on the status of their wildlife and on some incidents that intended to cast a shadow on the national wildlife management strategies of the participating countries were answered with resounding arguments.

In his opening remarks Dr. Ali Kaka got right to the point saying “We are talking about the sustainable use of wildlife”.

Namibia's Minister Pohamba Shifeta, for example, pointed out that friendly coexistence is a myth and that there is a price communities living in close proximity with dangerous wildlife pay. Namibia boasts of community conservancies established under enlightened legislation that allows people to benefit economically from the sustainable use and conservation of wild animals. Conservation hunting in Namibia is based on sustainability, and the proceeds go to the community conservancies. Therefore the communities understand the value of wildlife. Shifeta appealed to the listeners (and implicitly also to the greater community of CITES delegates) when he concluded: "Don't be influenced by emotions! First and foremost you need to comprehend the point of view of our rural communities, who live from and with wildlife!"

Namibia's Minister also mentioned that those living on other continents should stop prescribing Africans what to do with African wildlife. "They are infringing on the sovereignty of African states", Shifeta said. Participants could sense similar indignation from the representatives of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia, as well as from private conservancy owner Wilfried Pabst. Stephen Mwansa of Zambia stressed that "wild animals are there because of our conservation efforts and that includes their consumptive use!

"We're being told by people outside, by people my color of skin, how to run things in Africa," Wilfried Pabst, owner of the Sango Conservancy in Zimbabwe, said. He highlighted that the call for a ban earlier this year by some European Union parliamentarians on the importation of trophies was equivalent to banning hunting. "They have neither regard nor understanding of what they are effectively destroying. In southern Africa alone, if we ban sustainable use, we would eliminate some 55 million hectares of land under conservation and lose in the region of 20 million animals, hundreds of thousands of jobs, each man or woman supporting a family of 10, thus putting millions of local people into destitution," Pabst passionately explained. "Sustainable use is a "very successful conservation model", he said.

"Listen to me very carefully, I mean every word I'm saying," Pabst continued emphatically, "untold NGO's do good work, but there are those who are against the sustainable use of wildlife resources, those who are disguising the intention of banning sustainable hunting behind the mask of wanting to forbid the importation of trophies into Europe and the USA."

"I declare with conviction that the NGO's directly or indirectly propagating to end sustainable hunting, that these NGO's are criminal organizations. Did you hear this? Criminal. Because they are soliciting money under false pretenses - this is fraud and thus criminal. None of the donors are told, as they should be, that sustainable hunting is one of the two largest contributors in funding conservation globally. Taking the income from sustainable hunting away will destroy some 75% of all wildlife areas in southern Africa alone. If the well meaning donors would understand that these NGO's business plans they are funding would cause the destruction, they would not donate. They are kept in the dark that their funds are actually funding the exact opposite of what they believe their contribution would achieve."

"None of these NGO's would like to see an intact and growing Wildlife scene. Why? If Wildlife is well conserved as in southern Africa at large, these NGO's could not raise any funds, their business model would die, their offices, vehicles overseas trips would disappear. Conclusion? These

by CIC CITES Team & Gerhard R Damm

NGO's can only survive or thrive by leaving donors in the dark as to the real effect of their donations and they need chaos and destitution in wildlife conservation to solicit these funds. That is indeed a criminal business model," Pabst concluded.

Prince Mupazviriho Chiwewete supported Pabst, saying Zimbabwe had not received a single cent of the millions of dollars collected for Cecil the Lion. "When decisions are made without consulting us, without taking into consideration our interest, those decisions are not made in the interest of conservation" he concluded. Shonisani Munzhedzi (South Africa) added that "...local communities are the ones who have to be involved in decision making that affects them! They should be assisted and supported, and we need to ascertain that they benefit!"

"Sustainable use, conservation and fair equitable benefit sharing are the pillars of the natural resources! There is no way that we would have sustainable conservation without looking at the issues affecting people, " Munzhedzi concluded.

The Honorable Minister Oppah Chamu Zvipane Muchinguri (Zimbabwe) reinforced these statements by saying "it is easy for those not living with the elephants and other dangerous wildlife to preach and act noble. Yet it is our people who have to bear the cost of this existence. Removing incentives for these communities is to condemn them to perpetual poverty none can understand unless you have experienced it...." She also noted that "it was sad some governments and NGOs are failing to appreciate that sustainable use of wildlife is a key pillar to successful conservation. Communities as major custodians of wildlife resources need to continue accruing economic benefits from wildlife, since otherwise they would have little incentive to conserve it."

The Honorable Edith Edna Molewa, Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs (South Africa) mentioned already in her opening address to the CITES delegates that "our commitment to the sustainable utilization of natural resources contributes significantly to socio-economic development of poor and rural communities as part of our country's economic and social development."

Steven Mwansa passionately summarized the position of the panelists, "Please leave us alone!"

The CIC International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation is a politically independent and globally active advocacy working in the public interest with a diverse membership that includes states, corporates, universities and associations. The core strength of the CIC rests in dedicated hunter-conservationist members from all continents. CIC advocates wildlife conservation across diverse landscapes through shared incentive-driven use. Our adaptive management approach is grounded in cutting-edge science. CIC values traditional knowledge reflected in millennia of diverse hunting heritage. The members uphold and evolve the fundamentals of ethical hunting. CIC aims that each generation bequeaths to its successor intact landscapes richer in wildlife.

The CIC CITES Team consisted of Heli Siitari, President of CIC Division Policy and Law, Willem Wijnstekers, former CITES Secretary General & Deputy President of CIC Division Policy and Law, Willy Pabst, CIC member and conservancy owner in Zimbabwe, Tamás Marghescu, CIC Director General.