

by Bernard Lozé, President of the CIC

Hunting Is Conservation - Brussels 2016

The thoughts and prayers of the members of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation were with the families who lost loved ones and with the many who suffered wounds during the terrorist bombings in Brussels on March 22nd, 2016. These tragic events and other recent terrorist attacks in France, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey unite all people of good will to support the authorities of the civilized nations around the world in their relentless fight against the terrorist scourge.

Our 63rd CIC General Assembly in the heart of Europe honors the victims of the tragic events and serves as a show of strong support for our Belgian hosts.

I extend my warm and heartfelt welcome to our members, distinguished guests and hunters from around the world.

Hunters have historically been the vanguards of wildlife protection and conservation in Europe, Africa, North America, and indeed around the world.

Hunters were at the forefront in the creation of most wildlife protection areas and the developing of wildlife laws.

Yet hunting is currently the subject of intense but often ill-informed debate. Those opposing hunting often intentionally conflate legal hunting, poaching and wildlife crime likely to obfuscate people than enlighten them. Anti-use activists used this obfuscation to induce airlines to ban or severely restrict the carriage of legal hunting trophies. Anti-use activists infuse misinformation in their moves at various levels to end or limit hunting, and use it in public smear campaigns of prominent hunters. A group of Members of the European Parliament recently called for the signing of a declaration to ban import of trophies into the European Union.

The honorable MEPs who campaign for signing this declaration apparently did not have access to or chose to ignore significant information and facts about hunting. Did these anti-hunting parliamentarians ever ask themselves as to what inspires people to support conservation?

A 2015 study by researchers at Cornell University published in the Journal of Wildlife Management provides an answer: bird watching and hunting. The contributions of individuals who identified as both bird watchers and hunters were on average about eight times more likely than non-recreationists to engage in conservation. Those who practiced only bird watching were on average five times, and those who practiced solely hunting, four times more likely to engage in conservation. Both bird watchers and hunters were more likely than non-recreationists to enhance land for wildlife, donate to conservation organizations, and advocate for wildlife – all actions that significantly impact conservation success desired by a vast global majority.

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In the CIC we have a strong component of members who engage in the conservation of migratory birds – and this engagement is certainly not limited to birds which can be hunted. Our work encompasses all migratory bird species along the aeon-old flyways in the Americas, Eurasia and Africa – and beyond. The CIC has a permanent representative in the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA). We work closely with the World Organization on Animal Health (OIE), for example in combatting Avian influenza. Just recently the CIC co-sponsored a motion to prevent electrocution and collision impacts of power infrastructure on birds – with 14 other conservation organizations – to be presented at the World Conservation Congress in Hawai'i.

Show me the hunter who doesn't marvel at the majestic flight of a Lammergeyer over the highlands of Central Asia whilst hunting the wild sheep and goats. Show me the hunter who does not enjoy the sparkling dive of a kingfisher into the Zambezi River whilst taking a rest under the shadows of mighty Camelthorn trees after an exhausting morning on the track of a bull elephant. Show me the hunter who is not looking towards the skies in awe whenever the trumpeting calls and distinctive flight patterns of migrating cranes catch the ear and eye!

The respected magazine Science Daily said on its website that the findings of the Cornell University study could assuage concerns about diminishing support for conservation in the United States and its historic ties (both socially and economically) to hunting. One take-home message is apparent from the study: The more time we spend in nature, the more likely we are to protect it.

Hunters spend a lot of time in nature – the connectivity with nature, with the regional fauna and flora, but also with fauna and flora of distant lands, is the basis of their passion.

Throughout Europe landowners – communal, state or private – work hand in hand with hunters to preserve or restore habitats; to protect or create living space for wild creatures. Hunters and anglers led the revolution to save wildlife on the North American continent and remain today its most stalwart legion of support; they cooperate with wildlife managers and biologists from federal and state agencies. Hunters and anglers provide most of the wildlife management funding through an intricate excise tax system, hunting licenses and huge private donations channeled through hunting clubs. In southern Africa tourism and trophy hunting are reliable conservation funding sources.

In contrast, the no-hunting model – as practiced for example in Kenya and India, exhibits low performance, since in both countries large wildlife species are in decline. Statistical evidence proves that the no-hunting model is not self-sustaining. Tourism revenues cover only half of the wildlife management cost in these two countries and the balance has to be shouldered by the governments respectively the tax-payer or international donors.

In most of Africa, and Asia the worst threats to habitat and wildlife conservation are rural poverty and lack of knowledge. People, who live in poverty, as many rural Asians and Africans do, care little for wildlife aesthetics. This applies especially to those making a living from their livestock. They cannot afford to lose stock to predators; neither can they afford the competition for grazing associated with large numbers of wild ungulates. They have little in common, if anything at all, with the romantic views of nature of northern hemisphere city dwellers turned anti-use activists.

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Rural peoples throughout the two continents have often been relocated, dispossessed of land, or restricted in its use or in the use of wildlife on the land. This limits or eradicates traditional income sources. The real solution to address multi-dimensional poverty is village-based tenure and/or private rights to forests, fish, wildlife coupled with a requirement for democratic process.

The high value of many wild resources gives us a broad range of tools for successful incentive-driven conservation. Science-based programs will make conservation in Africa and Asia – and over large parts of South and Central America – finally independent of the emotional approach and neo-colonial pressure tactics from northern hemisphere protectionists and their conditional funding.

I am the first to admit that weak governance, corruption, lack of transparency, excessive quotas, illegal activities, poor monitoring and other problems plague hunting in a number of regions. The CIC and its partners are active on this front too. We are in constant dialogue with our partner hunting clubs, professional hunting associations, wildlife researchers and managers, and importantly, with the governments of range states, to eradicate unacceptable practices. The European Sustainable Hunting Initiative for Birds was the result of an agreement between BirdLife International and our partner FACE (Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU). The European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity was achieved with important inputs of the CIC. At present we are cooperating with a number of governments on the development of similar frame works for Africa and Asia. In its work the CIC relies not only on inputs from hunters – our organization counts amongst its leaders as well as amongst its rank and file a good number of non-hunting wildlife experts, scientists and university professors who help the CIC with constructive advice and expertise to take the right decisions.

When hunting – especially trophy hunting – produces a good financial return from a few hunted animals, it allows wildlife populations to be manipulated according to ecological rather than financial needs. This distinction is extremely important.

Prince William made a highly publicized reference to this recently (see the article of Drs. Knight and Emslie, both from the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group, in this issue of African Indaba).

Good conservation does not stagnate; it produces surpluses – and on finite lands surplus should be used for the good of the people who live with wildlife. Hunting programs are therefore a means to an end. Within these programs animals are harvested at a reasonable rate, not only maintaining trophy quality within healthy populations, but maintaining the populations to which these animals belong and most importantly ensuring that the land will be kept for wildlife. When conservation of animals becomes valuable to people living nearby, those animals are assured respect and their habitat will be protected.

You may have heard it often – but let me point out a salient fact once again: Habitat loss and degradation are the primary drivers of declines in wildlife populations. The disappearance of natural habitat is the principal cause of biological diversity loss at every level – ecosystem, species and genes, all of them. Yet, demographic change of the human population is accelerating and corresponding demands for land for development are increasing fast. They are exacerbating tremendous pressure on wildlife. This is most noticeably in biodiversity-rich parts of the globe.

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The need for viable conservation incentives becomes more urgent than ever. Well-regulated sustainable hunting has played, and is playing now and in future, an important role in this conservation game - at local level in front of your house door, or in foreign lands which you visit as a hunting tourist.

Well managed trophy hunting takes place in many parts of the world can and does generate critically needed incentives and revenue for governments, private and community landowners to maintain and restore wild lands and wildlife and to carry out multi-layered conservation actions and anti-poaching interventions. It can return much needed income, jobs, and other important economic and social benefits to indigenous and local communities in places where these benefits are often scarce.

In many parts of the world indigenous and local communities have freely chosen to use trophy hunting as a strategy for conservation of their wildlife and to improve sustainable livelihoods. Look to the Inuit in the Arctic, the community conservancy movement in Namibia, the village conservancies in Tajikistan and Pakistan, and many other shining examples around the world.

Hunting is Conservation - this is what inspires and drives us as members of the CIC and unites us with all hunters and conservationists around the world. Our debates in Brussels will demonstrate our commitment in the pursuit of excellence in hunting!

Yours in Conservation and Hunting!

Bernard Lozé

President of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation