

An Open Letter by the African Professional Hunters' Association



African Professional Hunters Association

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"neither fear nor foolhardiness".

In response to several countries discussing trophy import bans, the African Professional Hunters Association addresses this open letter to the legislators and politicians in the Global North who—with their legislative power—will be deciding the fate of Africa's wild lands and the continent's rich wildlife.

Africa, a continent that is lavishly gifted with various natural resources that can support the livelihoods of many Africans. These natural resources drive national and regional economic development, and include:

- Freshwater, marine and coastal ecosystems.
- Forests, wetlands, rangelands, arable land, and mountains.
- Wildlife
- Minerals and energy resources

Wildlife is one of the continent's most renewable and diverse resources, able to be utilized in both consumptive and non-consumptive ways. In order to flourish, however, it requires natural habitat that is protected and, ideally, where the primary land use is for supporting biodiversity.

Many national parks across Africa have been created for this purpose and to host photo tourists. Since many people desire to see Africa's wild animals, photo tourism can be a very lucrative industry, a massive foreign exchange earner for governments and private operators on these lands. A portion of the revenue generated must, of course, be put back into these areas to continue to protect them as wildlife lands. Photo tourism is typically a high-volume industry, however, so significant investment is also necessary for funding the required visitor infrastructure and services as well.

by Mike Angelides, President of APHA

But Africa has more wildlife habitat than the photo tourism market can support. And many of these wildlands are too remote, not scenic enough, lack infrastructure, or are habitats too difficult to view wildlife reliably in to be suitable for photo tourism. Yet they still hold the same valuable, natural and renewable resource, which is wildlife. Hunting tourists financially support these marginal areas by legally and sustainably harvesting a select number of animals.

Much like the photo tourist industry, the money generated from the tourist hunting industry is put back into these hunting areas to conserve wildlife so that these lands can continue to earn foreign exchange. But unlike the majority of photographic operators and lodges, hunting operators also directly, individually, conserve and protect the areas where they operate.

Hunting tourism differs also in that it is a lower volume model, requiring less infrastructure and visitor services, resulting in fewer impacts on the land. Despite the merits and utilities of hunting tourism as a scientifically proven conservation model, however, there are people who campaign to stop trophy hunting based largely on their own emotional responses and personal preferences. Only African countries themselves can ever directly ban hunting, so these critics adopt indirect tactics instead. They advocate for a ban on trophy imports so that hunters will not want to go hunting, thus disincentivizing hunting outfitters as well. If these misguided campaigns succeed, who will then fund the conservation of wildlife and habitat in the areas that will be vacated by the hunters?

Africa has a tried and tested conservation model that includes hunting. Any bans of legally hunted animal trophies will have catastrophic effects on this model of conservation, tragically erasing decades of careful and sustainable management. Management and land protection that has permitted wildlife populations to remain viable so that both photo and hunting tourism programs can effectively operate.

Although supporters of import bans claim such legislation will save African animals, these bans will ultimately achieve the exact opposite, resulting in unprecedented rates of habitat loss, with consequent wildlife depletion. We who are on the ground, fully invested in Africa, know what will happen when vast areas are vacated by hunting operators. When wildlife does not pay, it does not stay. These currently massive areas of intact wildlife habitat, irreplaceable reservoirs of biodiversity that currently encompass more land mass than national parks in many countries, will be encroached upon and depleted by logging, farming, livestock grazing and general human settlement expansion. Without hunting areas acting as buffer zones for adjacent national parks, the photo tourism industry and wildlife utilizing park lands will suffer greatly as well. The ultimate effect will be undeniably and irreversibly devastating to both wildlife and habitats. It is unimaginable that anyone who claims to love Africa's animals or to be concerned about conservation would not only wish to see that change, but would actively campaign for it.

Mike Angelides is the current president of the African Professional Hunters' Association APHA—an association of like-minded professional hunters who subscribe to a code of ethics, a code of conduct, and the promotion of sustainable use of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

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