



Partnership for  
nature and people

Statement during the Ministerial Segment at the International Conference to Develop a Common Strategy to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade, Palais de Congres, Brazzaville, Congo – 30.04.2015

**Excellencies, Madam President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen; all protocols observed.**

BirdLife International joins Africa and the rest of the world in lauding this historic moment, when words are translated into action in tackling wildlife crime. BirdLife International is a global partnership present in 120 countries, 24 of them in Africa, working with civil society organisations, Governments and local communities to promote a sustainable future by protecting key places and species. We are also the IUCN scientific Red List Authority on birds. BirdLife also contributes to the scientific reviews of proposals to change the listing of bird species on the CITES Appendices.

Through a network of 1,300 sites across Africa (Important Bird Areas, IBA), conservation action is effected through Site Support Groups and site monitoring data used to influence policy. Indeed the IBA network is an opportunity for addressing illegal wildlife trade and other conservation challenges facing African species.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, It is saddening to see many species of fauna and flora decline as a result of illegal trade. While a lot is known about the big charismatic species, little is known about the 'forgotten taxa'. For example, while birds play a critical role in the economies and ecosystems, nearly 4,000 bird species involving several million individuals annually are subject to domestic or international trade globally. In Africa, 37% (135 species) of the 365 globally threatened and near-threatened bird species are affected by deliberate hunting and trapping.

Examples of African bird species that continue to be threatened by unregulated legal and illegal exploitation and trade, including use of parts in traditional medicine are Vultures, African Grey Parrot, Timneh Parrot, Grey Crowned-Crane, Black Crowned-Crane and the Shoebill. Migratory birds also face serious hunting pressure at their feeding and breeding sites.

Commercial trade in wild birds in Africa comes in various forms: i) beautiful birds are kept as pets or for aviculture. ii) birds are also hunted primarily for food and iii) birds that are traded for traditional medicine. Each form of trade is to a large extent integrated and interdependent, since all involve initially hunters and finally traders.

The Grey parrot is disappearing in most of its range states due to illegal exploitation and unregulated legal trade. Unfortunately, most of the export quotas are based on poor population estimates, with many of the birds dying during capture and before export. It is estimated that over 1 million parrots entered international trade in 1982-2001. There is a thriving parrot trade in Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Another group that is affected by trade for traditional medicine are vultures, especially in West and Southern Africa. In Eastern and Southern Africa vultures are poisoned by poachers because they betray their presence. In West Africa vulture numbers have declined by over 90% in the last 30 years. Indeed African vultures could become extinct in our lifetime if urgent measures are not taken. This is worrying given that vultures clean up the environment at no cost. Elimination of vultures from the ecosystems will lead to human health problems, with diseases such as rabies, tuberculosis, brucellosis and botulism expected to rise.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the plight of traded birds is a reflection of the plight of other taxa. This is the reason we are here in Brazzaville to develop a Strategy and Action plan to address these serious matters. The Strategy that we are developing should be backed by political commitment and requisite financial resources to implement it. It is our only opportunity to demonstrate to the rest of the world and to future generations that we are worthy custodians of the natural wealth given to us – our wild fauna and flora.

What form then must the new Strategy take? It should reflect all taxa and species affected by trade; whether illegal or unregulated legal trade. We support formulation of a Strategic pillar that will specifically address birds, marine species and forgotten plants as proposed in the draft initially submitted by the Republic of Congo.

The Strategy should also address the livelihood needs of local communities, including their resilience to climate change, which has an indirect link to poaching and illegal trade. There is need to enhance regional cooperation and coordination, including for the timely and cost-effective repatriation of live illegally traded wildlife as called for by CITES. Priority should be given to the harmonisation of legislation and penalties related to illegal trade in wild fauna and flora to enhance region-wide deterrence.

Distinguished Delegates, the Strategy should have the highest level of endorsement by African Heads of State. Further, we propose that African Union takes leadership at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) by supporting Member States in introducing a resolution on Wildlife Crime with a strong reporting mechanism.

The development and ultimate completion of the Strategy should be inclusive. Non-Governmental Organisations, civil society and other partners should have an opportunity to participate in the mechanism proposed to take the Strategy forward. BirdLife International offers its support and expertise in the completion and implementation of the Common African Strategy to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade, on matters relating to birds.

Regarding Strategy implementation, we propose use of interdisciplinary approaches that engage communities at the grassroots with less emphasis on enforcement through weaponry.

Finally Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to thank the Republic of Congo for the warm reception and the African Union, UNEP and other partners for organising this conference.

This Statement is endorsed by the **Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)** and **World Animal Protection**.

I thank you.

*Brazzaville, 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2015*

For more information contact: [Ken.Mwathe@birdlife.org](mailto:Ken.Mwathe@birdlife.org)