

News Release

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October 2, 2016

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CITES Members Urged to Close Domestic Ivory Markets

(Johannesburg, South Africa) Member nations of a key global wildlife trade treaty today delivered a critical victory in the battle to save elephants from the devastating impacts of ivory trafficking by agreeing to clamp down on the sale of ivory within their borders. The United States, which recently enacted its own unilateral restrictions on the sale of African elephant ivory, had called on the signatories to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to take all necessary legislative, regulatory and enforcement efforts to close their domestic markets for commercial trade in raw and worked elephant ivory.

“The United States has taken strong actions to impose a near-total ban on elephant ivory import, export and domestic sale,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe, head of the U.S. delegation to the treaty’s 17th Conference of the Parties (CoP17) in Johannesburg, South Africa. “In September 2015, China committed to take similar actions. At this meeting, we’ve worked closely with Kenya and several other African elephant range states on this historic effort. The world is coming together on this issue and our goal now is to have all countries examine their domestic markets and take any and all actions necessary to ensure they are not contributing to ongoing poaching and illegal ivory trade.”

The illegal killing of elephants and trade in their ivory is a major problem across much of Africa. Poaching and illegal ivory trade threaten the survival of savanna and forest elephants, including those previously thought to be secure. Beyond the threat to the elephants themselves, this trade undermines the ecological integrity of African forest and savanna ecosystems, and it harms the sustainable economic development of local communities as well as elephant range states. Legal sales of ivory, including within domestic markets, increase the risk to elephant populations and local communities by creating a significant opportunity for the laundering of illegal ivory.

“Elephants are protected under CITES, but until each country with a domestic ivory market takes responsibility by enacting and enforcing strong laws to end the commercial trade in ivory, we won’t be able to staunch the

hemorrhaging of ivory out of Africa into markets around the world,” said Ashe. “Ivory should not have value unless it’s attached to an elephant.”

CoP17 is taking place from Sept. 24 through Oct. 5, 2016. CITES is an international agreement initiated in 1973 and since ratified by 182 countries and the European Union to protect certain wild animals and plants against over-exploitation as a result of international trade. More than 35,000 species of animals and plants benefit from CITES protection. Every two to three years, a session of the CoP is held to review, discuss and decide on changes in the implementation of CITES, including changes in protections for certain species.

To learn more about the Service’s involvement in CITES CoP17, visit:
<http://www.fws.gov/international/cites/cop17>.

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