

## **Eighteen West and Central African Countries Unite in the Fight Against Illegal Wildlife Trade Paving Way For Stronger Enforcement**

Dakar, Senegal, March 17, 2016 – Over the last two days, 18 West and Central African countries<sup>1</sup> met in Dakar, Senegal, to harmonize their joint commitment to fight against wildlife trafficking which threatens the conservation of biodiversity in Africa.

Wildlife trafficking has become a multi-billion dollar criminal enterprise with transnational organized crime organizations heavily involved in poaching and illegal wildlife trade. These activities are having a huge impact on wildlife conservation in West and Central African countries, as well as destabilizing economies and communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihoods.

The workshop, held under the leadership of The Honorable Abdoulaye Baldé, Senegal’s Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, culminated in the adoption of jointly agreed initiatives for the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES CoP17), which will take place in Johannesburg, South Africa from 24 September to 5 October 2016. Participants also adopted recommendations aimed at strengthening coordinated regional and sub-regional enforcement.

“The government of Senegal welcomes the decision to coordinate the wildlife enforcement efforts of West and Central African countries as a critically important step towards tackling international illicit trafficking in wildlife and wildlife products”, said Minister Baldé.

“The fight against increasingly organized and well-resourced wildlife traffickers is a priority we all share. The conclusions reached by participants at this meeting lay the groundwork to ensure that international wildlife trade is legal, sustainable, and traceable. Countries in West and Central Africa have also demonstrated their desire to identify a role for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) in wildlife enforcement coordination, offering unprecedented opportunities for the region.

We applaud this coordinated approach, and we urge the international community and our partners to support our regional efforts to fight wildlife trafficking together and efficiently.”

The workshop was organized by the government of Senegal, with financial support from the United States’ Fish and Wildlife Service, which is working through its programs to expand wildlife enforcement capacity in the region. Key recommendations approved by meeting participants include the development of a West Africa wildlife enforcement network through ECOWAS and the development of subregional networking mechanisms to enhance cross-border and subregional wildlife enforcement collaboration, and the exchange of intelligence on wildlife crime between enforcement agencies in West and Central Africa.

### **Editor’s notes:**

- CITES is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- The illegal trade in animals, plants (including timber and charcoal) and fish is one of the largest sources of criminal earnings in the world – ranking alongside trafficking of drugs, people and arms.

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<sup>1</sup> Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, and Gabon

## Press release from the Government of Senegal

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Today illegal wildlife trade is estimated to be worth US\$50- 150 billion per year. The global illegal fisheries catch is valued at US\$10-23.5 billion a year and illegal logging, including processing, at US\$30-100 billion (UNEP Year Book 2014 emerging issues update - Illegal Trade in Wildlife).

- African decision-makers have made tackling poaching and illegal wildlife trade a high priority through their contribution to multiple international conferences on wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade, including:
  - the *International Conference on Illegal Exploitation and Illicit Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa* hosted by the Republic of Congo (April 2015, Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo)
  - the *Elysée Summit on Peace and Security in Africa* (December 2013, Paris, France),
  - the two Conferences on Illegal Wildlife Trade (February 2014, London, UK and March 2015, Kasane, Botswana),
  - and the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN, March 2015, Cairo, Egypt).
- In July 2015 the United Nations General Assembly approved Resolution A/RES/69/314 on *Tackling the Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife* which encourages countries to “cooperate at the bilateral, regional and international levels to prevent, combat, and eradicate international illicit trafficking in wildlife and wildlife products through, inter alia, the use of international legal instruments.”
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