

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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REMARKS OF ROGERS C. B. MORTON SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR BEFORE THE OPENING SESSION OF THE PLENIPOTENTIARY CONFERENCE TO CONCLUDE AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON TRADE IN CERTAIN SPECIES OF WILDLIFE, STATE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C. FEBRUARY 12, 1973

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome the delegates to this important conference. You are here today not merely as the representatives of individual nations, but in a true sense as the representatives of mankind in a meeting with his own conscience. In our molding the world to fit human needs, we have taken upon our conscience the responsibility for the other species that we threaten, yet are privileged to share the bounties of this planet. Their evolution down the centuries has not equipped them to contest man's supremacy: if they are to survive it must be owing to man's self-control.

Today, all men share the bond of concern for the future of our planet. That bond is impervious to geographic, cultural, or ideological influences. Last year at the Stockholm Conference, we crossed the threshold of an era where all nations and all men agree to work together to save our natural heritage and protect our environment. What you do at this conference is an important part of that new international endeavor. For the threat to the wildlife of our earth -- the leopards of the Serengeti, the polar bear of the Arctic, the whales under the sea -- is in a sense a part of the threat to mankind from the degradation of his environment.

It is ironic that men can move so rapidly in doing harm to the environment and so slowly in protecting it. This conference had a long incubation period, going back at least a decade to the original efforts of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1963.

But time is moving on and for many species, it is moving against the future of our wildlife. The rate of extinction has been on the rise dramatically. Of the recorded extinctions of mammals over the last two thousand years, fully half have met their final fate within the last sixty years. It is sad to acknowledge to ourselves that during the ten years we have been preparing for this meeting, perhaps eight percent of all recorded mammal extinctions have taken place. My fellow citizens of the world our task is urgent.

Our task is by its very nature a truly international endeavor. In the final analysis, each country must carry the burden of protecting its own wildlife. But we have found that so long as international trade in wildlife is not controlled, the individual country, acting alone, is not able to act effectively to protect its native species which are threatened or endangered. If the demand is not controlled, the supplier nation cannot move effectively to protect itself. And even if one country acts to control its own demands-- as the United States has in its Endangered Species Protection Act of 1969 and the Lacey Act--the demand will merely move from that country to another, and the market still creates the same insoluble problem for the supplier country. Experience makes it clear: Unless we all act together to control trade in the endangered species, none of us will be able to act as effectively as we must to protect what is precious and is our own.

Therefore, you do have a vital and urgent task before you at this Conference. In concluding this Convention, you are performing an honorable

duty before future generations. You are showing man's responsibility in safeguarding the fragile legacy of the wild species of our world.

In welcoming you on behalf of the United States Government, I assure you that the people of this country--and truly all the peoples of the world--salute you in what you are doing.

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