



PRESS RELEASE

In the Fight against Wildlife Crime, ECOWAS Member States adopt the “Abuja Declaration on Conservation Priorities for the 18th Meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties 2019”

Abuja, Nigeria, 29 March 2019 – In the face of continued levels of illegal wildlife trade, which is destroying the natural and cultural heritage of their region and undermines sovereign efforts to manage their own resources, West African nations, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) met to define a common regional position ahead of the 18th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP18) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The two-day preparatory meeting, hosted by ECOWAS March 28th -29th, reviewed several proposals to save endangered West African species. These proposals, and others from around the world, will be tabled at, CITES CoP18 to be held May 23rd – June 3rd in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

ECOWAS Member States present at the meeting, organized with the support of ECOWAS partner West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change (WA BiCC), a USAID-funded Program unanimously adopted the “Abuja Declaration on Conservation Priorities for the 18th Meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties 2019” (Abuja Declaration). The meeting also provided an opportunity for representatives to continue working on a “Wildlife Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in West Africa.”

West Africa is home to an important, impressive and globally unique variety of wildlife species. This biodiversity is an integral and irreplaceable part of humanity’s natural heritage that must be protected for future generations. However, many wildlife species are currently threatened by over-exploitation for international trade. Through their adoption of the 2019 Abuja Declaration, the ECOWAS Member States have chosen to formally acknowledge that stronger monitoring of international trade is necessary and additional support must be provided for national and regional efforts to protect threatened species from the West Africa from going extinct. These include giraffes, African elephants, black crowned cranes, mako sharks, guitarfishes, wedge-fishes, African rosewood, pangolins, African lions and West African vultures.

West African countries are known to be source and transit States for the illegal exploitation and illicit trade in wild fauna and flora. Beyond the ecological damage, wildlife crime also negatively impacts the economies and livelihoods of local communities, while the involvement of transnational organized criminal networks undermines good governance and the rule of law. ECOWAS Member States therefore decided to work together and develop a coordinated counter wildlife trafficking response tailored to the region. Building upon the momentum from previous regional meetings addressing wildlife crime, the Abuja meeting concluded with the ECOWAS Member States further committing to strengthen the fight against the illegal wildlife trade and to continue their collective development of the West Africa Strategy on Combating Wildlife Crime (WASCWC). During this meeting, Member States also decided to use CoP18 to promote the development of the Strategy and its implementation mechanisms, such as the West Africa Network to Combat Wildlife Crime and the West Africa Fund for Combating Wildlife Crime.

“The ECOWAS Commission sincerely appreciates and welcomes the fruitful partnership with USAID which has spared no effort for creating an enabling environment for combating wildlife

trafficking and safeguarding the sustainable living environment in West Africa region. This will contribute immensely to improve the wildlife and biodiversity management for the fulfilment of our commitments towards the implementation of related conventions that ECOWAS member states have signed to and ratified” said Mr. Sekou Sangare, the Commissioner of Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources of the Commission.

On behalf of the Nigerian Government, the Permanent Secretary of Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Environment – Mrs. Ibukun Odusote, applauded the efforts of Member States for the adoption of the Abuja Declaration as well as for their ongoing commitment to prioritize law enforcement efforts to combat the wildlife trafficking that plagues the West African region. *“The Nigerian Government adds its voice to those of ECOWAS Member States in urging CITES Parties and the entire international community to support our efforts at combating wildlife crime,”* she added.

This preparatory meeting leading to CITES CoP18, lays the foundation for cooperation among the West African countries to tackle the issue of sustainable management of the forest and wildlife resources and combating the illegal poaching and trafficking of wildlife resources in the region.

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