EU action at international level- Development Support and Diplomatic Action

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Minister, Delegates and colleagues, fellow panel members,

Thank you to the European Commission for inviting me to join this panel and for giving me the opportunity to address today’s Expert Conference on the EU Approach against Wildlife Trafficking, in this session on EU action at international level through Development Support and Diplomatic Action

Introduction

I’d like to share some perspectives on this subject, as head of TRAFFIC, an NGO that has focused its work around the globe for the best part of 40 years on the conservation, social and economic challenges arising from wildlife trade around the world.

This is a critical time for action on wildlife crime. For a wide variety of reasons, the scale and nature of this challenge has evolved in ever more damaging ways over the past decade. Some conservation impacts are staring us in the face - others may not be obvious until the damage is irreversible. Illegal wildlife trade undermines livelihoods and resource security - and along with other areas of illicit trade, becomes a channel for corruption and organised crime, and the human insecurity, inequality and other harms that they cause.

If we are to reverse this trend, we need to do what the Commissioner suggested at the beginning of this meeting this morning and reach out beyond the traditional circle of environment expertise. We need new and strengthened approaches to protecting biodiversity at source, halting wildlife trafficking and reducing demand for illegal wildlife goods that draw on the best ideas emerging from the wider fight against illicit trades and organised crime.

Diplomatic action

Focusing on the questions addressed by this session - first on diplomatic action and international relations between the EU and other source, transit and consumer countries, I would like to commend and urge continued action by the EU on various fronts highlighted in the consultation document. These include the EU’s role in advocating strengthened action under CITES, the development of Voluntary Partnership Agreements on governance of and ensuring legality in forest trade, adoption of the EU Timber Regulation and leadership in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing at the international level. I also commend the attention paid to environmental issues during negotiation of EU Free Trade Agreements.
So what more should be done? Well first, reflecting on discussions in earlier sessions today, to have credibility in its external advocacy and actions, the EU and its Member States must address their own shortcomings with respect to enforcement effort, coordination and legal provisions to penalise offenders. With such best practice secured, the EU has a critical role to play in advocating and encouraging multilateral action to address this global challenge.

Key areas of focus should include consideration by the EU of the merits of development of a UN Resolution and Appointment of a UN Special Representative to drive the highest level of political attention and scrutiny. Also needed is proactive EU engagement with other regional efforts to address wildlife crime, such those in ASEAN, South Asia and a number of African subregions to share experience of cooperative efforts to stop illegal wildlife trade that has been built up in the EU over the past 30 years. The EU could ask do a lot more to promote attention to wildlife crime under the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the UN Convention against Corruption and through the Financial Action Task Force which sets standards for and evaluates the implementation of anti-money laundering measures.

There is also a great deal that can be done at a bilateral and practical level through EU and Member State diplomatic relations with key supply, transit and market countries to encourage reciprocal action, establish information sharing arrangements, provide technical assistance to investigations and advocate greater intervention effort where it is not being taken already.

Back to some of the good things already done, the global influence of EU measures on forest and fisheries trade will only be realised if regulatory measures are rigorously and consistently applied. And attention to wildlife trade issues in negotiation of Free Trade Agreements needs to be handled with care, so that existing regulatory measures are not undermined.

Finally in terms of diplomatic action, I will stress the need for the EU to make much more effort to collaborate with governments of other major consumer markets, especially the US and China. Without coordinated action, there is a risk that illegal trade simply shifts from market to market along the path of least resistance.

Development support

Similarly, with respect to development support, there are many positives to reflect upon already. As noted in the consultation document, EU development cooperation already helps to address illegal wildlife trade by putting efforts in conservation, capacity-building and enforcement support. This includes biodiversity conservation support in Africa, financial backing of the CITES elephant monitoring systems and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime, and funding flows under the FLEGT Action Plan and the REDD+ mechanism.
That said, and as acknowledged in the consultation document, development support from the EU in this field have sometimes lacked coherence between conservation, livelihoods of local populations, enforcement and good governance.

I recognise that external money is not always what is most needed by countries working to address illegal wildlife trade. Nevertheless, since such funding is sometimes needed, this is a critical time to influence programming of EU development cooperation for the period 2014-2020 and other EU funding mechanisms. In source countries there is need for support to strengthening governance and regulation, investment in livelihood alternatives and sustainable use options and financing for development of regional cooperation networks. In transit countries, again there is a need for investment in efforts to tackle corruption, mobilise intelligence, improve detection and to ensure that offenders are prosecuted. For some consumer countries, there is no major need for external financial assistance, but for others there could be significant benefit from investment in critically important market research and targeted communications efforts.

These same funding needs should be considered by individual member states, some of which (including Germany, the UK and the Netherlands) already invest significant resources to help other countries efforts to address illegal wildlife trade. These individual and EU-level funding initiatives would undoubtedly benefit from better donor coordination to avoid duplication or lack of attention to critical gaps in resource needs.

Closing

In closing, I stress that current dynamics of illegal wildlife trade should not be surprising. They reflect how ways of doing any sort of business, legal or not, have evolved and continue to change so fast. Market opportunities have moved as wealth and consumerism have grown in different parts of the world. Communications channels, transport routes and accessibility, financial payment systems and people’s mobility have shifted in ways that were hard to imagine only a couple of decades ago. All you need to become an international wildlife smuggler nowadays are some creative ideas and a smartphone.

The trends that most affect the business of wildlife crime today and complicate the challenge of getting it under control are the same shifts in communication, access and markets that shape the wider economy. The challenge is keeping up with the pace of change.

Right now wildlife crime is relatively high on the political agenda, we have fairly consistent legal frameworks, government enforcement agencies are engaged far more than ever before in working out how to intervene, some in the private sector are adopting serious safeguards to avoid buying illegal wildlife goods, particularly timber and fish, new tools such as wildlife forensics are at our disposal, and we have evidence that consumer purchasing choices and therefore
the opportunities for reward from wildlife crime can and do change when the messaging is right.

Yes, we need more of all of this - especially when it comes to enforcement resources and collaboration- and the EU has a critical role to play, but let’s not forget that we have more in our favour now than ever before. Maybe our biggest challenge is in translating the good intentions of meetings like this into the direct action that’s needed to ensure the harms from wildlife crime are drastically reduced before the damage is irreversible. I hope all participants leave here confident that they are going to play a part in making sure that a meeting like this a decade from now has some real progress to celebrate for a change. It’s not out of our reach.

Thank you.