

## **The Bonfire of the Vanities Revisited - IEA Blog - September 2016**

In April of this year Kenya wantonly destroyed some US\$110 million of ivory, rhino horn and other wildlife products in what was described at the time as an ineffective, self-seeking publicity stunt, an opinion borne out by the recent release of data from the Great Elephant Census, funded by Paul Allen, showing the loss of some 30% of elephant over the last decade and an increase in contemporary loss rates. A further devastating report by a number of eminent Kenyan scientists, released this month, censured Kenya's conservation efforts: despite the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in wildlife conservation by international and national agencies, NGOs and private donors Kenya has lost 70% of her wildlife over the last 40 years.

Yet bathed in self-righteousness following the destruction of her ivory stocks Kenya will be in the vanguard at the forthcoming CITES meeting in Johannesburg of those supporting the intensification of the ban on both the international and domestic ivory trade and for the iconoclastic destruction of all stocks of ivory.

Wildlife conservation policy in international forums like CITES has been highjacked by an extremist, almost religious, alliance of animal welfare lobbyists who support wildlife protectionism and oppose any wildlife utilisation or trade. This will lead to an inevitable, further decline of wildlife throughout Africa.

Like it or not, there is compelling evidence that wildlife in Africa flourishes, and more land is made available for it, where there are wider rather than narrower opportunities for economic utilisation; where ownership and user rights are more, rather than less, devolved to landowners and users; where wildlife generated revenues are shared equitably and transparently between producers and consumers; and where the wildlife conservation authorities adopt an enabling rather than a purely enforcement and regulatory role.

In South Africa, where wildlife became fully fungible (in de Soto's terms), wildlife numbers increased more than twenty times over the same period of time that protectionist Kenya lost 70% of hers.

It is indeed extraordinary that despite her totally abysmal record in conservation Kenya is hailed as an exemplar by the international conservation community while the southern African countries which have so successfully conserved their wildlife are treated as pariahs.

These Ivory Wars championed by Kenya simply cannot be won: the required resources will never be mobilised, neither is there the political will, while the collateral damage within Africa becomes ever greater and more onerous. The only way forward is for an Ivory Peace: if Africa's Asian friends and partners are willing to invest untold millions in infrastructure and natural resources development they will indeed invest in elephant conservation and ivory production so long as they are guaranteed a dependable, transparent and legal supply.

Both sides want the same thing, lots of elephants and lots of ivory -- a very good starting point for meaningful negotiation. No peace process is easy, but if it can be achieved in South Africa and northern Ireland then it should not be beyond the wit of mankind to achieve the same for elephant.

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