

Remarks by IWMC's President at the Closing Ceremony of CITES CoP17

Madam Chair,

Please allow me to associate myself with previous speakers in congratulating all those having contributed to the organization of CITES CoP17.

Madam Chair, due to the important increase in poaching and in related illegal wildlife activities, the international community has reinstated the *Inquisition* in order to identify the *witch* or *witches* responsible for this drama. The Inquisition quickly identified *trade* as the culprit and therefore the witch to be burnt.

However we cannot burn trade, it is a concept - most likely the most important concept in the history of humankind that has allowed societies, communities and peoples to link together. So we decided instead, to burn the symbols of the concept i.e. ivory tusks, rhino horns and other confiscated wildlife specimens.

But while the bonfire was on, we **threw** in it the *history book* that tells us that prohibitions do not work, have never worked, and will never work.

By the same occasion we threw in the bonfire, the *dictionary of definitions* to replace it by our own definitions. As such, the definition of a hunter and a poacher is the same. There is no different definition between legal trade and illegal trade: harvesting a wild animal is called murder; a skilled ivory carver is considered a forger; bribery to a poor game warden is corruption; bribery to a senior official or politician is commitment to environment; and so on.

All those new definitions mixing legalities with illegalities together then fall under the general definition of "wildlife crime", a message that celebrities, crowned or not, are too happy to carry throughout the world.

Finally, Madam Chair, we also threw in the bonfire, the *Charter of Human Rights* and quickly replaced it by the *Charter of Animal Rights* and the *Poachers' Charter*. And this with dramatic consequences for people.

Madam Chair,

- When I hear the comments by the Distinguished Delegates of Japan and of the Democratic Republic of Congo complaining of harassment because of their political stands on certain issues;
- When I hear the emotional appeal from Swaziland completely ignored for obscure reasons;
- When I realize that the advice from the FAO on proposals related to marine fish species are being completely ignored; and

- When I hear the call for help, understanding and support from Madagascar being replaced by a call for punishment from the developed world, including from a major NGO;

Then, Madam Chair, I realize that CITES is getting away from its mission to conserve wildlife for the benefit of people as clearly stated in the Preamble of the Convention.

Madam Chair, there is a wrong perception of CITES. I can hardly understand the “chanting and dancing” taking place whenever a new species is listed on the Appendices. If a species is listed in the Appendices for valid reasons – and we have recommended several of those – there is certainly no reason to rejoice: to the contrary, it is a sad day for humanity indicating its failure to take care of nature. However, if the listing has for objective “the listing itself” - with no consideration whatsoever for the effects on conservation and on people - then “chanting and dancing” is certainly appropriate...

But at the end, Madam Chair, we came here in South Africa to listen to the people and to learn from them. After all, it is in this part of the world that the real relationship between humans and the other living creatures has been developed. We had everything to learn from South Africa and its neighbors. It is very unfortunate that there were only a few to listen to your voices.

Thanks to the Chairs of Committee I and of Committee II but mainly thanks to you, Madam Chair. You are a perfect reflection of your people: charm, warmth and wisdom.

Thank you.

Eugene Lapointe

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