



**IWMC**  
**World Conservation Trust**

3, Passage Montriond  
1006 Lausanne, Switzerland  
Tel/Fax: +41(21) 616-5000

1470 Heather Ridge Blvd, Unit 104  
Dunedin, Florida 34698, USA  
Tel/Fax: +1(727) 734-4949

email: [iwmc@iwmc.org](mailto:iwmc@iwmc.org)  
[www.iwmc.org](http://www.iwmc.org)

The Private Secretary to  
His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge, KG, KT  
Clarence House  
London SW1A 1BA  
United Kingdom

27 March 2015

Dear Sir,

**Conservation of Wildlife**

For eight years I was honored to serve as the Secretary General of CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Today, as an advocate for the conservation of wildlife, I write to urge caution on some of the positions taken recently by the Duke of Cambridge with regard to African elephants and sharks. While I applaud his concern for these species, my concern is that the statements he has made are ultimately not conducive to facilitating effective wildlife conservation.

Unfortunately, there is a great deal of misinformation about the plight of the African elephant and the rhinoceros. The common perspective in the west, to which I am afraid he appears to have succumbed, is that prohibiting legal trade will save the species. In reality, prohibition provides incentives for poachers, criminals and black marketeers and, coupled with widespread corruption among government and enforcement officials, creates the very conditions for abhorrent and indiscriminate killing of the animals. History and experience teach us that these illegal activities are best curtailed by a well-organized and controlled legal trade.

And while campaigners tell us that we must eliminate demand for ivory and rhinoceros horns, the reality is that demand will continue to exist, as it has for hundreds of years. It may be possible to “raise awareness” but eliminating demand for ivory will prove as elusive as turning back the tides. Burning ivory stocks achieves nothing beyond making headlines and generating good feelings – and by reducing supply, it makes further poaching more lucrative. The fact is that elephants will continue to produce ivory and poor rural communities will continue to share their land and life with the animals. Southern African countries have done a good job of providing local incentives for elephant conservation by allowing ivory to be utilized and the result is healthy elephant populations and low levels of poaching; others, like Kenya, have criminalized the utilization of ivory and are stricken with poaching. It is not “greed” that motivates this poaching but the subsistence imperatives fuelled by poverty.

The Duke of Cambridge’s mother was renowned for helping to alleviate human suffering. In the context of wildlife conservation, today’s celebrities tend to espouse the cause of wildlife species while vilifying humans for using them. Unfortunately, this increases human suffering

and widens income disparities for those relying on wildlife resources for their survival. Trade in ivory, like trade in more everyday products, serves a necessary purpose. It is not just some simple trinket trade that can be easily manipulated. It is a trade that involves centuries-old skills which have produced amazing artefacts, such as those found in the fabulous collections owned by the British Royal family, private collectors and numerous museums around the world.

The Duke of Cambridge also recently made a statement about sharks to the World Bank in Washington, DC. I would like to draw your attention to an inaccuracy in what was said. At present, not all shark fins require a permit for export. Considering the broader thrust of the Duke of Cambridge's comments, I would suggest that Air New Zealand's ban on transporting shark fins will not have any discernible impact on the practice of finning sharks at sea. Further, the value of "interrupting the supply chain" for shark and other wildlife products is not necessarily positive from the perspective of conservation or animal welfare. While I applaud companies for developing ethical and corporate responsibility policies, I am also experienced enough to understand that their actions are often taken for commercial reasons and are not entirely altruistic. As such, symbolism often weighs higher in importance to corporate executives than the production of any tangible benefit to wildlife.

Against this background, I would urge you not to promote the idea that legal trade in wildlife products promotes illegal trade. Scientists and wildlife managers have devoted (and continue to devote) considerable effort to analyzing this concept using the hard evidence they have gathered primarily from the ivory trade. The balance of evidence casts considerable doubt on its veracity. I and many fellow conservationists believe that the opposite is true – that a carefully managed legal trade will tend to crowd out illegal trade. Suppliers and buyers alike both prefer to operate in a legal market. And since a legal market can be regulated, policymakers can affect species management in a positive manner.

I hope that the Duke of Cambridge will carefully consider these points as he moves forward with any future plans to promote the conservation of wildlife around the world.

Your faithfully,

Eugene Lapointe  
IWMC President  
Former Secretary-General of CITES (1982-1990)

