

This talk was delivered - upon the special invitation of the Zimbabwean Minister for the Environment, The Hon. Oppah Machinguri-Kashiri - at a government conference convened to determine a “road map” to the CITES Cop-17 conference in Johannesburg (September 2016).

CITES – A Southern African Perspective

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I would, first of all, like to thank the Honourable Minister for the Environment, Water & Climate, Oppah Muchinguri – Kashiri, for inviting me to address you today. It has given me the opportunity to discuss with you many hitherto unknown controversial CITES issues about which nobody seems prepared to talk.

The reason why Africa is in its current predicament with regard to CITES is because, for years, everybody has been reluctant to speak of these truths. So - today - I want to tell you some of the facts about CITES - as I see them. I am impelled to do this because I believe Africa’s wildlife is under dire threat - and that concerns me! I also believe that if our wildlife is to be saved, the time has come to open up Pandora’s Box.

Great damage is being done to Africa’s wildlife because of the way CITES operates, and it will get worse if the truth is not revealed and discussed openly; and if Africa’s sovereign states do not force change in the status quo. One of the most important realities we have to face, is that CITES is now the greatest impediment to ‘best practice’ wildlife management programmes throughout the world; and it has become the principle cause of biodiversity loss and wildlife extinctions in Africa.

And THAT is the conundrum!

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The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) was created in 1975. Its purpose was to stop the illegal wildlife trade. All responsible nations

joined because they believed the CITES 'cause' was justified; and because its intentions were worthy of international support. Each sovereign state member was given one vote.

The only way to halt the illegal trade, CITES contended, was to first properly regulate the legal one. This required that every nation on earth voluntarily surrender, to the convention, their sovereign rights to trade in their own wildlife and wildlife products as they, individually, saw fit. Thereafter, international wildlife trade was permitted only under the aegis of strict CITES codes and in accordance with the consensus vote of its official delegates. All sovereign state members were required to agree to abide by this dubious voting system.

The entire world complied like a flock of obedient sheep!

I now ask you to open your minds and to give this state of affairs your undivided attention.

When they joined CITES, the independent states of southern Africa - including Zimbabwe - relinquished control of their respective sovereign rights to manage their own wildlife affairs - but they did not *exactly* give those rights "to the convention". They actually surrendered them to the personal whims of a host of politically appointed delegates representing (today) 182 foreign lands. It is *they* who have the voting power to determine how any country should or should not manage its own wildlife resources. It is *they* who decide how the nations of the world should conduct their international wildlife trade. Yet very few of these delegates have any knowledge about Africa's wildlife or its management needs. Nor do they understand its potential to improve the lives of our rural people. Furthermore, none have any accountability for the results of their decisions. And the "range-states", alone, have to live with the consequences - good or bad.

I will explain, later, what a 'range state' is.

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I now introduce you to a subject very pertinent to this discussion - the importance of national wildlife cultures. This is a phenomenon of which few people are

aware despite the fact that wildlife cultures impinge greatly on the workings of CITES.

Every person on earth is a product of his national culture - which comprises many sub-cultures. Every nation, for example, has a language culture; a dress culture; a religious culture; a political culture; an eating culture; and a wildlife culture - to name but a few. And each country's history has influenced these sub-cultures in many ways – which is what makes them unique.

Toddlers in every country in the world are brought up steeped in all their nation's various cultures, and by the time they become adults their cultural heritage is indelibly imprinted on their souls.

Cultures are very powerful instruments. Try for example, to get an Islamic man to convert to Christianity or to Judaism; or a Protestant to become Roman Catholic. Try to get Arab nations to allow their teenage girls to wear bikinis on the beach. Try to get a Frenchman to stop speaking French - and force him to speak English. If you try to enforce any one of these issues you will experience fierce resistance and you will not succeed. So, although you may never have heard of wildlife cultures, know that they are very real - and don't belittle their influence over the people who are unconsciously governed by them.

Now to the crux of this matter!

Americans describe their wildlife culture as being “anti-market hunting”. This means, they can legally hunt an indigenous animal but they cannot sell any part of it. In America, no-one can buy a common white-tailed deer steak in a restaurant or in a supermarket!

We southern Africans talk about our wildlife cultures as being “commercial”. Within this region we trade in live game animals all the time. We buy and sell indigenous venison and game biltong in butcheries and corner cafes all year round. A common saying in our part of the world is that: “If it pays it stays”.

The American and southern African wildlife cultures, therefore, are completely antithetical. They are the exact opposite of each other!

Hunting is the backbone of all southern Africa's wildlife industries; and the South African statistics repudiate the animal rightists' constant lament that hunting does not benefit wildlife. Within South Africa:

- Private game ranches:
 - comprise 16.8 percent of all agricultural land;
 - carry 16 million head of game animals;
 - contribute R 9 bn to the national GDP; and
 - permanently employ over 100 000 people.
- In comparison, national parks and nature reserves combined:
 - comprise only 6.1 percent of all agricultural land; and...
 - they carry only 6 million head of game animals.
- rewards from game ranching are three times greater than those obtainable from conventional domestic livestock farming; and
- since 2008, the wildlife industry has provided greater profit returns per annum than any listed investment on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

I am sure that you Zimbabweans can offer similar statistics that equally well prove the sustainability and viability of hunting and harvesting as desirable wildlife management tools.

From this, you will understand that western countries are in no position to tell any country in southern Africa what it can and cannot do with its wildlife; even though our conservation ethic differs from theirs. Nevertheless, we are without doubt - collectively - world leaders in the sustainable utilisation of wild living resources.

So we must be doing something right!

By the same token, we cannot and must not dictate to the Western World. And, to my knowledge, none of us do!

Many Western governments, however - and their arrogant animal rightists NGOs - have no compunction about telling southern Africa that its wildlife management ethic is wrong.

This leads me to the nub of what I really want to say on this subject. EACH of the 182 sovereign state delegations to CITES is imbued with a specific and dogmatic wildlife culture that differs from any of the others. And we can be sure of one thing: their own cultural indoctrination definitely affects each and every delegate's thinking; and, therefore, how he or she will be inclined to vote.

The all-powerful American administration has demonstrated that it is not at all averse to imposing its own wildlife culture ideologies on the sovereign states of Africa; and there is every reason to believe that the entire 182 "wildlife-cultural-mix" at CITES will also affect the vote when a consensus opinion is sought. It must be said, therefore, that it is virtually impossible for the delegates at CITES to give an honest and totally unbiased opinion on any wildlife management matter - even without the coercive and aggressive influence of the accredited animal rightist NGOs.

This is an incredible state of affairs!

I find it impossible, therefore, to comprehend how any independent state can justify surrendering its sovereign right - to manage its own wildlife resources - to such a medley of confusion and contradictions.... especially when all 182 of these voters are constantly harassed by the corrupting, fanatical and abolitionist influence of the accredited animal rightist NGOs.

There is another complicating and confusing parameter which will make it even more difficult for many international delegates to make honest, responsible *and pertinent* decisions at CITES.

The states of southern Africa look upon their wildlife resources as WILD products of the land; just as they view cattle, sheep and goats as TAME products of the land. And they believe that BOTH should be used wisely and sustainably for the benefit of their people. This fact EQUATES the status of WILD and TAME products

of the land; the only difference between them being the manner in which they are harvested.

In southern Africa wildlife is without doubt a marketable and harvestable resource. It is certainly not the “sacred cow” that the Western World seems to consider it to be. So there is a vast difference between the wildlife management paradigms that are entertained by Western nations and those that are applied in southern Africa.

The entire world has yet to come to grips with this very important reality.

The integration of the needs of wildlife in southern Africa, with the needs of its rural people, has only just begun; and there are many people and organisations applying themselves to the development of this essential ideal. The fact that this has not fully materialised in many parts of southern Africa, therefore, is not an indictment; it is a matter of historical reality. But the will is definitely there.

Absorbing Africa’s rural people into the sub-continent’s wildlife industries will not happen overnight - but it WILL happen - if it is allowed to happen. The only factor that can stop it, is if the CITES NGOs force through their objective - during Cop 17 - to impose an international ban on all wildlife trade and hunting.

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Now let us consider the situation that applies to the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*).

There are 150 (+) elephant populations in Africa distributed over 37 countries. These countries are known as the ‘African elephant range states’. So this will tell you what a ‘range state’ is! One hundred and forty-five CITES delegations (80 percent), therefore, are NOT from elephant range states; yet CITES decisions concerning the management of Africa’s elephants - based on a consensus vote remember - are determined by all 182 delegations.

The *specific* opinions offered by the delegates of the elephant range states (i.e. the opinions of the people who have the greatest knowledge and expertise about

elephants and their management), therefore - because they have agreed to abide by the consensus vote - are virtually irrelevant.

So the destiny of Africa's elephants now lies *totally* in the hands of people from foreign lands who have no knowledge whatsoever about, or interest in, 'best practice' elephant management programmes. And most of these people, quite frankly, couldn't care a damn whether the elephant sinks or swims. This situation also applies to all other species on the CITES agendas.

The CITES secretariat, which is responsible for administering the convention, and which oversees the legitimacy of procedures when CITES is in session - but which is not permitted to influence the voting - has tried to rectify this glaring defect:

(1). By issuing position papers on every species listed on the CITES agenda. These papers are designed to provide delegates with a *very basic* background to each of these species.

This - because of the vital importance of the CITES vote to the range-states - is truly not nearly good enough!!!

And (2). By accrediting NGOs of every persuasion to the convention!

This was implemented with the specific purpose of enabling these NGOs to closely interact with the sovereign state delegates, and to thus further 'educate' them (in the management needs of each species on the agenda). But it must be noted that most of these NGOs are Western animal rightists who also have no knowledge of the animals concerned; and who wish to abolish all animal uses by man (including trade). So this state of affairs is a case of the blind leading the blind - and in the wrong direction! This situation has also had other chronic repercussions.

This policy has developed into a very dangerous and quite inappropriate state of affairs. It has proved to be to the detriment of the range-states and their wildlife resources; and it is, ultimately, damaging to the purpose of CITES itself.

Accredited NGOs are given exactly the same rights of participation at CITES as those enjoyed by the official delegates - *except they hold no vote*. They do, however, command tremendous 'persuasion power'. Consequently, animal rightist NGOs have flocked to join CITES where they now - without any doubt – control the convention's direction. Indeed, CITES has become their most powerful weapon ever. Even the CITES Secretary General seems to be a fellow-traveller of the animal rights brigade!

So... we must ask ourselves: Why would animal rightists - whose prime objective is to ABOLISH all animal 'uses' by man (including the wildlife trade) - want to join an organisation, the purpose of which is to REGULATE the wildlife trade? The answer is obvious. They joined CITES in order to sabotage it.

And how do they accomplish this? To understand the answer to this question, one has to constantly remember the uninformed circumstances of the official delegate team.

Whether the species on the agenda is the African elephant, the Javan rhino, the arctic walrus, the green sea turtle of the Caribbean, or the orangutans of Sumatra and Borneo, over 90 percent of the official delegates voting on the fate of these animals, hail from non-range states. Most of them have never seen the species concerned; they have no biological knowledge of it; they don't have any understanding of its management needs; they have no idea how the species integrates with the human populations that share its environment; they have no idea of the potential benefits these animals can bring to their countries of origin, and to the local people, if they are managed sustainably; and, finally, the delegates will be totally unaffected if - as a consequence of their votes - the species survives, thrives or becomes extinct.

It is diplomatically correct to believe that every signatory to the convention - and every accredited NGO - is an upstanding member of international society; one who will act honourably when the time comes to cast his or her vote (or to influence another's vote).

Don't be naive!

The fact is: It is common practice for the NGOs to wine and dine the official delegates throughout the duration of each convention - extending to them every kind of overture imaginable to convince them to vote according to their host NGO's beliefs. Many delegates have no firm convictions so they are easily persuaded. Some votes are simply purchased.

I have in the past been told, personally, by more than one delegate, that they attend CITES to meet with their regular NGO benefactors who pay them upfront. In these cases, there is no haggling, no bartering, and the subject species is of no consequence. The delegate wants a particular payment for all his votes and his demands are met. Two African delegates told me, with great glee, that their return airfares to CITES had been paid, as had their hotel accommodations and meals, and their bar bills - even their ladies of the night costs - in return for their pledges to vote as directed by their NGO host. And when the agendas are lengthy the number of such manipulated votes is considerable.

When the NGOs return home - having negotiated (for example) an international ivory trade ban and/or having had the elephant declared an 'endangered species' - they are amply rewarded by their gullible public donors who praise them highly for their accomplishments; and who replenish their diminished coffers handsomely.

(There is no such thing, incidentally, as "an endangered species".)

The animal rights doctrine, therefore, supports what has become the biggest confidence industry the world has ever known. It is now intricately interwoven with acquiring CITES votes; and racketeering is rampant. Many NGOs, for example, have declared the elephant (or lion or whatever) to be on the verge of extinction. That this is untrue is of no consequence. What matters is that that fabricated statement generates an enormous emotional response from a totally and purposefully misinformed First World public - and, as a consequence, it generates for each NGO substantial donation funding.

And it is BIG funding. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW - the biggest animal rights organisation in the world) for example, is said to command

an annual income of over US\$ 200 million. And HSUS (The Humane Society of the United States) has an annual income of US\$ 150 million. So what these NGOs earn is not chicken feed.

And it is to a very vulnerable position within this putrid imbroglio - of what really amounts to highly organised international crime - that the governments of 182 sovereign states (probably in honest ignorance) have bequeathed their country's wildlife resources and their citizens' natural heritage.

This, to me, is a truly inconceivable state of affairs!

No matter what the rest of the world might think of the convention, under these circumstances I believe the countries of Africa need to seriously reconsider their continued membership!

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There are a few steps that CITES itself can take to rectify its shortcomings (but this might be too little too late):

- It can change its NGO accreditation rules and thus purge itself of its greatest problem - and OUR greatest problem - which is the existence, within its structures, of the accredited animal rightist NGOs. All CITES has to do to effect this purge is to insist that all NGOs applying (or re-applying) for accreditation status be required to endorse their support for the sustainable utilisation of living resources; for a properly regulated wildlife trade; and for sustainable and ethical hunting and/or harvesting.
- It can restructure its operations to ensure that ONLY the range states be allowed to recommend the management strategies of their own wildlife resources. (It is, after all, within the range states that the greatest amount of knowledge concerning every species on the agenda, is lodged). CITES, therefore, cannot get a better and more qualified source of knowledgeable information and advice anywhere else! And last -
- It can remove the vexing consensus vote.

There is, unfortunately, nothing that anybody can do to improve upon the lack of essential knowledge that is an inherent problem within the vast majority of the CITES delegations. This is the convention's greatest weakness and I believe it will ultimately be the cause of its dissolution.

The entire world needs to understand that it should not allow itself to be lead by the nose by the animal rights brigade as has happened in the past. They should also understand that the accredited NGOs at CITES don't *want* CITES to REGULATE the wildlife trade. They want CITES to PROHIBIT trade. And they want to force a ban on ALL hunting, not only trophy hunting. If they succeed, southern Africa's already large, laudable and constantly expanding wildlife industries will be destroyed overnight.

I think we can all agree that CITES was an experiment that was created with the best of intentions. Time, however, has demonstrated that it cannot function in the manner that was envisaged. It promised the world that it would regulate the legal wildlife trade and that it would stop the illegal one. Yet, in the 40 years of its existence, it has done neither. All that has happened is that the CITES secretariat has provided the international animal rights brigade with the platform and the tools to destroy Africa's 'best practice' wildlife management programmes; and to demolish the potential for the vital development of sustainable wildlife utilisation programmes that will benefit the continent's people.

I sincerely believe that Africa would be better off without CITES. I look forward to the day, therefore, when the continent's states tell the world that "enough is enough"; when they recover their sovereign rights to manage their own wildlife affairs as they see fit; and when they regain control of their international wildlife product markets. In my opinion, Africa's wildlife will not be safe until all this happens!

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