
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: AFRICAN ELEPHANT SPECIALIST GROUP

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The 10th Conference of the Parties (COP) to CITES has come and gone leaving behind two very critical decisions affecting the African elephant. COP 10 also left behind one additional residual effect - a tremendous amount of confusion among a tremendous number of people in a tremendous number of places. Since the COP, I have visited the four "comers" of Africa as well as Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States. I have found that, for the most part, people are unclear on what exactly was decided at COP 10. Even for those of us present in Harare it is often necessary to stop and reflect on the actual wording of the decisions and what they truly say.

Of the two major decisions regarding African elephants and their ivory, the first decision mandated the transfer from Appendix I to Appendix II for the elephant populations of Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The downlisting signifies a clear recognition that populations of these three countries do not meet the biological criteria for maintenance on Appendix I; Appendix I being reserved for those populations of species threatened with extinction due to unsustainable exploitation for the purpose of commercial trade. At the same time as these three populations were downlisted, it was agreed that a legal, one-off sale of identified stocks of known national origin (25.3t for Bots, 13.8t for Na, 20t for Zm) could be allowed between the three proponent countries and Japan, once strict conditions have been met. Compliance with these conditions can be judged by the Standing Committee but the earliest any reopening of trade will even be considered is at their meeting in early 1999.

Herein the confusion. What the Parties **did do** was to vote on a strict set of conditions which must be in place before CITES could allow a one-off sale between Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Japan to take place. What the Parties did not do was to approve the blanket resumption of legal, international ivory trade. The clear and continuing confusion on this point concerns me greatly. From the day of the vote, newspapers and people around the world have announced the decision that "the ivory ban has been lifted". Whether these statements are made in ignorance or with conscious intent to mislead is unclear. But what is abundantly clear is that such

false statements are potentially very dangerous for elephants.

Spreading a false message of this sort can only be damaging to the very elephants that the world cares so much about. It would be better if the message was louder and clearer that the ivory ban was not lifted by the Parties and will not be lifted until very strict conditions have been met. Even then, the only resumption of trade will be limited to set amounts in the three proponent countries that have been checked and verified through the CITES Panel of Experts process. **There will be no new killing, no new ivory and no new amounts admissible under this agreement.**

The second elephant-relevant decision of COP 10 allowed for a one-off, non-commercial buyout of marked and registered government stocks in the Range States of the African elephant. In taking this decision, the Parties to CITES allowed only a 90-day period in which to mark and register these stocks for verifiable audit by TRAFFIC later in the year. The decision stipulates that any proceeds from the non-commercial sale of registered and audited stocks must be ploughed back into elephant-related conservation through the establishment of trust funds dedicated to this cause. The actual fate of purchased stocks is not specified in the decision but no resale will be allowed, thus limiting the "buyer's" options to destruction or indefinite, secured storage. In effect, the buyout decision has allowed the establishment of an alternative ivory trade for some Range States, albeit a non-commercial one. Sale of stocks is just that - a business transaction, transferring ivory from seller to buyer, commercially or noncommercially. This alternative trade allows ivory of unknown origin and source to be sold to willing buyers for non-commercial use. If it works as hoped, its biggest contribution will be the expenditure of these proceeds on the conservation of elephants.

Another false message which is finding its way around Africa is also concerning me. It is being suggested that this non-commercial buyout may only be the first in an ongoing series of buyouts. This is untrue and would

clearly defeat the primary purpose of the decision - to remove Africa's existing ivory stocks from the legal or illegal commercial trade. By the closing time for registration (18 September 1997), only 18 of Africa's 37 Range States had declared their stocks. Although some may hold significant stocks, the remaining 26 Range States did not register by the cut-off date.

If there is a clear message that no further noncommercial buyouts will take place then, at best, we can hope that a significant portion of government-held stocks have been captured in this process. However, if there is no clear reinforcement of the agreed decision, that this is a one-off, non-commercial buyout, then I believe there may be dangerous "signals" being transmitted to the world. If there is any reason whatsoever, for anyone to believe that this is just the first in a series of such buyouts then I fear we may see an increase in the illegal offtake of elephants in Africa to feed this new "market" demand. Ivory trade, whether commercial or non-commercial, legal or illegal, can only be controlled by applying the most stringent of measures and surely the protection of Africa's elephants, where they live, is one of the most important considerations. Whether or not Botswana, Namibia or Zimbabwe commercially trade their limited stocks and whether or not the additional 13 countries that registered their stocks are able to find willing non-commercial buyers, the majority of African elephant Range States will have emerged from COP 10 empty handed with no increased ability to accomplish what they most need - to protect effectively and manage their elephants and the current illegal trade in ivory.

As I (and many others) have long argued, with or without CITES and the decisions of the Parties, trade in ivory continues and, in some parts of Africa, the offtake is surely unsustainable. As the Chair of the AfESG, it is this fact that concerns me most. There is still a market for ivory and it is very likely increasing. There are new trade routes and new trade dynamics but they are probably continuing virtually unhampered. If we really mean business about protecting Africa's elephants from the scourge of illegal killing, then we must be prepared to put our cards on the table, pool our resources and put our money where the mouths are. If we can not stop demand (which I believe to be an impossible goal) then we will have to protect elephants. Protecting Africa's elephants is a costly affair. With few exceptions, the donors have not distinguished themselves with meeting these costs but have left it to the beleaguered African governments to carry the burden. I believe the Range States want to rise to this challenge, but it is a long and

treacherous road to self-sufficiency, laden with political minefields. Why should they carry the burden for being the guardians of a global resource? Probably because no one is willingly coming to their aid!

While the funding side has yet to be resolved, the need to get on with the technical tasks could not wait. IUCN/SSC, through the African and Asian Elephant Specialist Groups, were cited repeatedly in the relevant CITES Decisions and Resolution and given explicit responsibility for the technical development of a monitoring system to track the illegal offtake of elephants in the Range States and to develop a means of determining whether "observed trends are a result of changes in the listing of elephant populations in the CITES Appendices and/or the resumption of legal international trade in ivory". The first step in this undertaking took place in December 1997, when thirty of the top individuals in the business of elephant management, law enforcement and ivory trade control spent a most intensive and challenging week of brainstorming. The group came to the clear conclusion that this will be a very big and expensive undertaking, requiring continual updating, with many potential pitfalls along the way.

On the other hand, there was tremendous enthusiasm that, in the long term, we should be able to gain a grip on the status of populations and the flow of trade across the Range States of Africa and Asia if fundamental elements of an international monitoring system are put in place. It was recommended that the AfESG help further to develop data needs and modalities for collection and compilation on illegal killing as well as identifying specific sites where this monitoring should be carried out. TRAFFIC will work with the CITES Secretariat, the World Customs Organisation, INTERPOL and others to establish and maintain a monitoring system on the trade side.

How these recommended systems will be implemented and who will shoulder the costs remains to be seen. 'Re will of IUCN/SSC, TRAFFIC and many concerned individuals to assist in this process is clearly apparent. The will of the relevant governments, other Parties and the donors has still to be demonstrated. I believe legal commercial or non-commercial sales of any sort should not resume until such will is clearly shown. The Range States now have a chance to commit to such a monitoring scheme and make it happen. It is envisaged that such commitment will be sought at the next meeting of the Range State Dialogue envisioned for some time later in

1998. IUCN has already been asked to continue to facilitate the dialogue process and funds are now being sought.

CITES COPs never pass without a build-up of storm clouds and a torrential downpour of unexpected and unsolicited work on IUCN/SSC and particularly the AfESG. Not unlike any African deluge, the rain stops and we are left to get on with the tasks at hand no matter how muddy and slippery the paths may be. The AfESG has another challenging year ahead. The new membership has been appointed to the year 2000. We will kick off 1998 with a members' meeting in Burkina Faso. This is the first meeting of the entire Group to be held in French-speaking Africa and, once again, we have the USFWS to thank for making it possible for all members to attend. The year will also encompass the elephant's share of the work in updating the African Elephant Database in preparation for a 1999 hard-copy release. The Secretariat and many members will continue to assist in our ongoing process of "south-

south" capacity building while a new generation of qualified African scientists and managers is graduating and joining the ranks. The Human-Elephant Conflict Task Force has set out an ambitious work programme and must now try to secure the necessary funds to be able to really kick their efforts into high gear. Somehow, there is never a shortage of work nor a shortfall in challenges to undertake.

In my resting and waking hours, these challenges never venture far from my thoughts. Recently, while sitting on the beach in Petit Loango Reserve on the Atlantic coast of Gabon, I reminded myself that the real battles for the survival of our elephants will be won or lost inside and outside protected areas in the savannahs and forests of Africa not in the back halls and conference rooms of future CITES COPS. It is because of this that we must use the expertise, the tools and the knowledge available simply to get on with our primary goal conserving and managing Africa's elephants into the new millennium and beyond.

RAPPORT DE LA PRESIDENTE: GROUPE DE SPECIALISTES DE L'ELEPHANT AFRICAIN

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La dixième Conférence des Parties (COP) à la CITES s'est déroulée puis terminée en laissant derrière elle deux décisions tout à fait critiques pour l'éléphant africain. La COP 10 a eu aussi un effet résiduel supplémentaire, à savoir une confusion effrayante chez un nombre effrayant de personnes en un nombre d'endroits effrayant. Depuis la COP, j'ai visité les "quatre" coins de l'Afrique et de l'Europe, le Royaume Uni et les Etats Unis. J'y ai découvert que, pour la plupart, les gens ne savaient pas exactement ce qui s'était décidé lors de la COP 10. Même pour ceux d'entre nous qui étaient présents à Harare, il est souvent nécessaire de s'arrêter pour réfléchir aux termes réels des décisions et à ce qu'ils signifient en fait.

Des deux décisions concernant les éléphants d'Afrique et leur ivoire, la première entraîne le transfert des populations d'éléphants du Botswana, de Namibie et du Zimbabwe de l'Annexe 1 à l'Annexe II. Le déclassement en lui-même signifie clairement que l'on reconnaît que les populations de ces trois pays ne répondent plus aux critères biologiques d'un maintien à l'Annexe I; celui-ci est en effet réservé aux populations des espèces menacées d'extinction à cause d'une exploitation non soutenable à des fins commerciales. Au moment où ces trois populations étaient déclassées, on a aussi accepté qu'une vente légale, unique, des stocks identifiés d'origine nationale connue (25,3 tonnes pour le Bots., 13,8 t. pour la Na., 20 T. pour le Zm) soit autorisée entre