

Summary of Interventions by CITES Chief of Enforcement Support, John Sellar, at the 1st Technical Committee Meeting of the UNEP/CMS Gorilla Agreement (held in Kigali, Rwanda, 29-30 March 2011)

The CITES Secretariat described its involvement in great ape issues and the convening of a CITES Great Ape Enforcement Task Force a few years ago. This had led to awareness-raising material and a detailed Alert, providing the law enforcement community with descriptions of the nature of illegal trade in great apes, smuggling methods, routes, and what drives such trade.

A CITES Ivory and Rhinoceros Enforcement Task Force will be convened in May 2011, in which one gorilla range State will participate. Its activities should benefit other species too.

It went on to advise delegates of the creation of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), which is formed of the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Bank, and the World Customs Organization. ICWC will be undertaking a number of activities in 2011, from which gorilla range States may be able to benefit. In particular, the Consortium will commence a pilot project to establish 'Controlled Delivery Units' in twenty countries. This will involve training Customs, police and prosecutors in each country who can respond when shipments of illicit wildlife are detected being smuggled across borders. Action can then be taken to identify those behind the 'links' in such smuggling 'chains'.

The CITES Secretariat also described the WCO's recent Operation GAPIN, involving 15 countries in Africa, intended to target illegal trade in great apes and to address integrity issues in Customs authorities. The Operation consisted of a capacity-building workshop, followed by a two-week long focus by authorities to target the smuggling of wildlife. Whilst no smuggling of apes had been detected, a significant quantity of other illegal-origin wildlife had been seized.

CITES also advised the Committee of the gorilla technical missions that CITES CoP15 had instructed should be carried out. These will involve personnel from the CITES Secretariat, GRASP, INTERPOL, and the World Customs Organization. These will mirror similar missions conducted by CITES and GRASP in the past to examine illegal trade in orang-utans. CITES indicated it would be pleased to receive suggestions as to which range States (probably just two) might be visited. The missions are unlikely to take place until late 2011 or 2012.

CITES welcomed the news from COMIFAC that a wildlife enforcement network is being considered for Central Africa. It noted the existence of such networks in several other areas of the world but stressed that lessons should be learned from the way in which these had been developed, and operated, and offered to provide advice if that was desired. It also stressed that it is vital for such networks to be multiple-agency. Wildlife or parks authorities cannot combat wildlife crime on their own; Customs, police, financial crime units, etc. must all collaborate in responding.

The CITES Secretariat stressed the fact that it was the only one of the five agencies in ICWC that had wildlife crime-related staff funded through its core budget. Consequently, the Consortium's ability to support countries was limited. However, the Consortium is preparing a work programme, and related project proposal for funding, and delegates were encouraged to take advantage of this and make known whether they would like to see ICWC involved in gorilla issues.

CITES welcomed the high-profile that some Agreement Parties were giving to gorillas, such as Uganda's decision to have the image of a gorilla on its currency and the fact that the image of gorillas can be regularly seen in Rwanda. CITES had noted, during its work on orang-utans that making such species part of the 'national identity' appeared to have very favourable results, with apparently less willingness by citizens to engage in crimes against these animals.

The CITES Secretariat finished its intervention by reminding delegates of the wide range of capacity-building materials that ICCWC agencies have readily available and encouraged Agreement Parties to make contact with them to seek these, and other specialized support.

In a subsequent intervention, CITES emphasized its view that, whilst often welcome and regarded as commendable, the involvement of NGOs in enforcement matters had negative as well as positive implications. Such involvement, or projects, should perhaps ideally be seen as 'stop-gap' measures and Parties should never abdicate their responsibilities to NGOs. Nations must recognize that law enforcement, and the protection of natural resources, is a duty and responsibility of governments and their relevant national agencies.