

13 April 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-Level Special Event on Wildlife and Forest Crime**

**Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations office on Drugs and Crime,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I thank the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and members of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime for organizing this meeting.

It is indeed timely, as a Congress on crime prevention and criminal justice would not be complete without discussions on wildlife and forest crime. This is especially the case regarding the so-called emerging crimes, which many countries and regions are grappling with.

Wildlife and forest crime has far reaching implications. It has the potential, not only to devastate the environment, but also to undermine the social, political and economic well-being of societies, while generating billions of dollars for criminal gangs and sustaining their illicit activities.

The figures on global wildlife trafficking are indeed troubling. In 2013 alone, some 20,000 African elephants were slaughtered. In the same year, more than 1,000 rhinos were killed on the continent. According to the World Wildlife Federation, rhino poaching in South Africa rose from 13 in 2007 to 1004 in 2013; representing a 7,700% increase. Elsewhere, other rare species, such as the pangolin, are being trafficked in the thousands.

Beyond wildlife crime, the world's forests are disappearing at an alarming rate, jeopardizing livelihoods and compromising the absorption of dangerous carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Around the world, illicit logging is causing irreparable damage while contributing to destructive deforestation.

While these trends are certainly worrying, it is heartening to see the increased interest of the international community on these important issues, as demonstrated during last month's Commemoration of World Wildlife Day.

For its part, the General Assembly has adopted several resolutions underscoring the urgency of this matter. Other fora, such as the United Nations Environmental Assembly have, inter alia, emphasized the need to implement existing international legal instruments and commitments, and further enhance international coordination to combat the illegal trade in wildlife.

Excellencies,

In light of the theme of today's event, I would like to highlight the following points:

First, we must make wildlife and forest crime serious criminal offenses to ensure policymakers and law enforcement agencies can respond appropriately. The ratification and implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crimes (UNTOC) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) can be an important tools in this regard.

Second, we must address both the demand and supply sides of wildlife and forest crime. Illegal logging, poaching and trafficking of endangered species will continue so long as markets for their products exist; illicit, or otherwise.

Third, preventing the trafficking of animals can only be successful with enhanced cooperation, both among nations and within regions. UN agencies, such as UNODC have a major advocacy role to play in supporting Member States and regional organizations.

Fourth, there is a need to strengthen the capacities of countries to curtail such activities. Many countries lack the capabilities to detect, deter, apprehend or prosecute those responsible for wildlife crime. We must work together and provide capacity-building assistance to those countries in need.

Fifth, the communities where wildlife and forests are found must not only be sensitized against these destructive practices, but must also benefit from the preservation of the wildlife and forests.

Finally, we must raise awareness and dispel commonly-held myths that drive the demand for many of these symbolic animals by promoting sound, evidence-based advocacy.

Excellencies,

There is no single panacea for saving animals close to the edge of extinction or for protecting the world's shrinking forests. As a global community, we have already taken important steps; but more must be done. I have just outlined some critical areas that should be addressed.

I hope that today's discussion will help galvanize further action in this regard.

I thank you for your attention.