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8th OECD Task Force meeting on Countering Illicit Trade

Paris

Session III: Countering key enablers in the illicit trade of wildlife

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to thank the OECD for inviting me to be here today, and to speak to a distinguished audience on a topic that is very close to my heart.

Illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products is a serious issue that requires urgent action. As I am sure you are all aware, the scale of these recent trade flows is unprecedented, with recent data revealing a sharp decline in the number of some species, many of them facing extinction. This not only threatens our environment, but also has the potential to leave permanent consequences on our biodiversity.

However, let us not be distracted by this apparent low risk activity. This problem goes far beyond the environmental crime. Within the illicit trade pyramid, illegal trade in wildlife is fourth only to drugs, people, and firearms, having wider connections with these and other criminal activities.

It is estimated that this activity generates approximately 20 billion dollars per year, in money that circulates outside the legitimate financial flows, and that is used to fund other crimes. These include terrorism and armed conflict in countries where good governance and the rule of law are weakened by fragile democratic structures, lack of economic opportunity and, sometimes, domestic and social unrest.

Therefore, on top of environmental destruction, illegal wildlife trade also presents an economic and security challenge, which should be addressed with seriousness,

using the tools and mechanisms available in a comprehensive and integrated fashion, in order to look past conservation on the ground and address the interconnectedness between cause and effect, supply and demand, and transit routes.

To tackle illegal wildlife crime, we must also tackle its enablers. Corruption is one of the main facilitators of this activity, and one that we must pay more attention to. The report I recently wrote for the International Trade Committee in the European Parliament, strongly recommends the EU and the Member States to increase their vigilance, and to reinforce cross-border measures in order to identify and prevent money laundering associated with wildlife trafficking.

Therefore, sharing data is imperative but there is still a lot of work to do in this area, both within the EU and with partner countries.

Coming from a trade background, it is my firm belief that trade policy can support this fight, helping in the conservation efforts, and in delivering sustainable development and environmental protection. Trade will always be a priority to governments, and we must make use of it to address other issues that do not benefit from the same level of urgency, but are nonetheless important.

The European Union's Trade for All Strategy reflects these concerns, supporting the inclusion of anti-corruption provisions in future trade agreements. The anti-corruption and transparency principles must be consistent with the highest possible levels of transparency, mostly where they affect regulatory standards and decision making by public institutions.

Trade Policy must strive for solid and detailed sustainable development chapters in its future trade agreements, similar to the one included in the EU-Vietnam FTA. It is vital to have strong leadership in the negotiation and implementation of higher standards covering international trade in wildlife.

Illegal trade in wildlife is a problem that requires strong and consistent international cooperation, the creation of new policies, and the implementation of new ones, must

be done in the context of the global trade and environmental regimes such as the WTO, CITES, WCO, UNDP, and OECD.

We also must seek further and deeper cooperation with the private sector and non-governmental organisations, ensuring that all the stakeholders involved have a say and contribute to the fight against illegal wildlife trade.

Drawing the linkages between e-commerce, transportation, and distribution, is key to establish a well-rounded and comprehensive approach, addressing both supply and demand, as well as breaking chains, to tackle illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products.

The support from customs authorities is strategic if we want to disrupt the transnational criminal networks that traffic wildlife and wildlife products. However, it is not enough to target them, it is crucial that the appropriate follow up is given in terms of penalties, which should be proportionate, dissuasive, and in line with international commitments

Creating policies and legal frameworks is important, but they are meaningless if not followed by an appropriate and consistent implementation.

We must look at it with pragmatism. Cracking down on poaching and illegal wildlife trade is more than protecting animals. It is going after resourceful transnational criminal networks that threaten our security in our own territory. I am sure you all remember the tragic story of a rhino recently poached in a zoo here in Paris. Illegal trade in wildlife is not a faraway problem. It is right here on our doorstep!

The activities of these groups create a parallel economy that funds other crimes. The billions of dollars that circulate outside the legitimate market also represent losses in government revenue. This is particularly striking in the case of African countries, which lose approximately \$25 million a year in tourism revenue due to poaching.

As a politician and lawmaker, I have been working very hard to put this topic at the top of our priorities, but it is important that we all do our part, and that the appropriate resources are in place for the execution of existing policies. The discussion must

keep going and we must embrace the momentum created by CITES CoP17 to act on it.

If we do nothing, future generations will be deprived of the magnificence of our environment.

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