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## **1st meeting of the Committee of Experts on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law (PC-ENV)**

**Strasbourg, Council of Europe – 3-4 April 2023**

Statement by Alice Pasqualato, Policy Officer, Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime

Thank you Chair - it is a great pleasure for me to be here today, representing the Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime, which has been recently granted Observer Status to this Committee.

The Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime is a nearly 3-year-old international initiative, hosted by ADM Capital Foundation and chaired by former Secretary General of CITES, John Scanlon AO. The Initiative is supported by 30 international Champions from all over the world, including the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Global Coalition to Fight Financial Crime, the International Ranger Federation and many others. It is a broad alliance of environmental, legal, business and public health organisations and experts coming from across every continent, which was created in 2020 to address the serious gaps in the existing international legal framework for combating wildlife crime and regulating wildlife trade. In particular, the Initiative advocates for, and offers technical support towards two objectives: 1) the creation of a [new global agreement](#) on wildlife crime; and 2) amending and supplementing current international laws to take a [“One Health” approach](#) to wildlife trade and markets. Since we are here to talk about environmental crime today, I will only focus on the first one.

Among all forms of environmental crime, wildlife trafficking is one that particularly stands out for its severity, volume and economic value. It is a major transnational organised crime, estimated to generate billions of criminal proceeds each year – often ranked as the fourth largest global illegal trade after drugs, counterfeit goods, and human trafficking. According to a recent [report by the World Bank](#), wildlife trafficking is worth between \$1-2 trillion each year, when one includes the economic impact of the lost ecosystem services (e.g., carbon storage, biodiversity conservation and water filtration).

Other recent reports clearly describe the severe consequences of wildlife trafficking for our biodiversity, climate and ecosystems, as well as for human and animal health. In 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) [estimated](#) that around 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, with overexploitation, including through wildlife trafficking, being one of the main drivers. The same IPBES also [warned](#) that an estimated 1.7 million currently undiscovered viruses are thought to exist in mammal and avian hosts – half of which could have the ability to infect humans. This is concerning, because wildlife trafficking is known to bring humans into close, unnatural and

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unmonitored contact with wildlife, increasing the risk of potentially zoonotic pathogen emergence, proliferation and spill-over.

Wildlife trafficking also involves the theft of vital natural resources from local and indigenous communities, it discourages legitimate investors, and undermines the governments of source countries – by depriving them of revenue, fuelling corruption, destroying livelihoods, injuring and killing rangers, and creating national and regional instability.

For all of these reasons, the presidents of four biodiversity-rich countries, Gabon, Costa Rica, Angola and Malawi, publicly called for the adoption of a global agreement against wildlife crime, taking the form of an additional Protocol under the UNTOC – the main global instrument to fight transnational organised crime. Three protocols already exist: one on human trafficking, one on migrant smuggling and another on firearms manufacturing and trafficking. The adoption of an additional Protocol under the UNTOC covering wildlife trafficking was also supported by the European Union in its recent policy: first in the [EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025](#) and most recently, in November 2022, in its revised [Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking](#). Earlier this year, in February 2023, the American Bar Association [also urged](#) UNTOC parties to adopt an additional Protocol on preventing and combating wildlife crime.

But there's more: on May 2022, the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice adopted a [resolution](#), originally submitted by Angola, Kenya and Peru, inviting Member States to provide the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) with their views on possible responses, including the potential of an additional Protocol to the UNTOC, to “address any gaps that may exist in the current international legal framework to prevent and combat illicit trafficking in wildlife”. It was the first time a UN resolution ever mentioned a potential new global agreement on tackling wildlife trafficking and launched an intergovernmental process to explore the possibility of creating such an agreement.

As we gather here in Strasbourg today, in Vienna - where I am based - the UNODC is continuing to collect Member States' views on a potential global agreement to tackle wildlife trafficking. The countries leading on that front, Angola, Kenya, Peru, Gabon and others, are not members, nor observers, of the Council of Europe and could not be here today to articulate why strengthening the international legal framework against wildlife trafficking is a propriety issue for their governments – but I am. So on behalf of the Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime I would like to urge this Committee to closely monitor the ongoing process within the Vienna UN Duty Station, to ensure that any Environmental Crime Convention developed under the auspices of the Council of Europe can complement the efforts of other States in other relevant fora.

Europe is one of the largest markets in the world for illegal wildlife and wildlife products. From elephant ivory to reptile leather, to birds and other exotic pets: our region's demand for wildlife species and products continues to fuel environmental crime in countries that often do not have the same resources and capacity to fight it. The negotiations of a new European Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law present Members of the Council of Europe with a unique opportunity to reflect on the role our region plays in the global trafficking of wild fauna and flora and take action to fill the serious gaps in the current international legal framework. (Now, in the interest of time, I won't articulate what those gaps are today, but my team and I remain fully available to discuss the matter with any of you, at any point).

Mr. Chair and distinguished delegates, the Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime looks forward to following the work of this Committee and the development of a future new Convention. We wish you every success in this important endeavor.