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WILDLIFE
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Vienna, 17 October 2024, UNTOC COP12 SIDE EVENT

WILDLIFE CRIME HAS DEVASTATING IMPACTS; HOW ENHANCED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION CAN HELP PREVENT AND COMBAT THESE SERIOUS CRIMES

EXPERT INTERVENTION FROM: Juliana Machado Ferreira, Executive Director, FREELAND Brasil

My name is Juliana Machado Ferreira. I have been specializing in counter wildlife trafficking for almost 20 years but I am originally trained as a Conservation Biologist.

I come from the most mega biodiverse country on the planet, Brazil, which, like too many other countries, is sadly heavily overexploited for its biodiversity, which is not only trafficked for the internal markets, but also transnationally. In most destination countries, with few exceptions, when illegal non-native wildlife is detected, authorities can act in four situations:

If the trafficker is caught in the act of smuggling

If there are serious violations of animal welfare standards

If there is sanitary risk, or

If the specimen belongs to a species listed in CITES

CITES provides the legal framework for regulating legal international trade in species of wild animals and plants that are listed in its appendices. Nonetheless many listed species are still heavily trafficked by people who exploit weaknesses in the convention and in its implementation. For example, traffickers make use of fraudulent documents, they launder species, such as by falsely claiming that animals are captive bred when they are wild caught, and they mis-declare different species.

And when the trafficking is intercepted, the Convention does not require states to criminalize these breaches. Because of the low risk high profit perception of these crimes, and weak

traceability methods, we are witnessing an endless, and potentially ever growing, trafficking of flagship species such as golden-lion tamarins, Lear's macaws, among others.

Therefore, while CITES is a valuable convention for regulating the international trade in listed species, which is about 0,5% of the world's species of fauna and flora, it was not designed to combat wildlife trafficking and it does not have the capacity or the tools to combat wildlife trafficking effectively.

Furthermore, Brazil, as well as many other source countries, has taken a sovereign decision to protect all of our biodiversity, not just the limited number of species listed under CITES, with requirements for permits to be obtained for almost every use of any wild species. People who fail to comply with our laws in our country are penalized administratively and, many times, judicially. This is critically important as less than 1% of more than 120,000 species of our wild animals that are protected under our law are subject to some international regulatory control.

Earlier this year a group of police, environmental authorities and myself visited a reptile fair in an European country. We found that several species of our biodiversity were being traded widely. Most of these species were not CITES listed and did not require any certificates or permits to be issued under the convention for international trade. As such, according to international law, they were not being traded illegally.

These are usually recently described or undescribed species, endemic, with restricted ranges, with unknown conservation status, which are highly desired by collectors, hobbyists or researchers. In this example, although several representatives of source countries pointed to likely illegal sourcing of these specimens under their national laws, there was almost nothing that the local authorities at the destination end could do.

Therefore, in most cases, people can sell worldwide illegally sourced wildlife, obtained by breaking a source country's laws, without any sanctions in the destination country. That cannot be allowed to continue. Wildlife trafficking impacts the welfare of millions of animals, threatens the survival of species, impacts human economy and wellbeing, and the governance of nations.

An additional protocol to the UNTOC covering wildlife crime, and possibly other environmental crimes, could be used to set out a range of commitments between countries, including to oblige states to criminalize the import of any wildlife, or wildlife product, that is taken contrary to the national laws of the source country. And if a crime is included in a Protocol it automatically triggers the UNTOC's general tools for cross border cooperation, without the need to make offenses punishable by four years imprisonment or more.

In my view, and based on my years of experience in Brazil and elsewhere, such a protocol would have the power to revolutionize international cooperative action to counter wildlife trafficking; and I do hope that Parties to the UNTOC view it in the same way.

Wildlife Crime has Devastating Impacts; How Enhanced International Cooperation can help Prevent and Combat these Serious Crimes

Hosted by Brazil, and supported by Peru, Angola, Costa Rica, and 15 organisations, we will explore the devastating impacts of wildlife crime, including on biodiversity, climate change and human health. Join us for a discussion on the need to enhance international cooperation, and the possible strengthening of the international legal framework, to prevent and combat wildlife trafficking.

17 Oct 2024
2:00-2:50pm

Room CR7,
Vienna International Centre

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