

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Doha (Qatar), 13-25 March 2010

STATEMENT BY KUNIO MIKURIYA, SECRETARY GENERAL,
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The attached document has been submitted by the Secretariat at the request of the World Customs Organization*.

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**15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora**
13-25 March 2010, Doha, Qatar

Statement by Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General, World Customs Organization

Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is great pleasure and honour for me to be able to address this esteemed 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES.

Let me begin by assuring you that Customs administrations will continue to play an active role in enforcing CITES at borders as national boundaries are the frontline in the fight against trans-border environmental crime. The border is the last line of defence to prevent smuggled goods from reaching the domestic market. Coordinating our efforts at borders is therefore essential and in fact, coordinated border management is now recognized by the WCO as one of the Organization's 10 key building blocks for managing trade and ensuring effective compliance in the 21st century.

Mindful of the need to preserve wildlife, the WCO has been raising the awareness of its frontline Customs officers and facilitating their enforcement tasks. Indeed, the WCO Council has adopted several recommendations on transnational environmental crime in the past years; the latest one in 2008 calls for all 176 WCO Members to continue their efforts to combat environmental crime and to ensure that the environment remains a priority issue in Customs operations. Building on its Council decision, the WCO chose "Customs and environment: protecting our natural heritage" as the Organization's key theme for 2009 and has expended enormous efforts to enhance Customs cooperation in this respect.

One of the reasons behind this focus on the environment is the effort by the world's Customs community to remain responsive to the concerns of citizens across the globe that the international trade in species should be legal and sustainable, and that those who commit environmental offences should be actively pursued. In fact, I have received positive feedback that Customs officers were proud to join global endeavours aimed at preserving mother earth and its biodiversity. Another reason for this theme was the awareness that unfortunately the degree of non-compliance with CITES remains considerably high. By way of example, when 90 Customs administrations launched a global one-day intensive CITES control to mark the WCO theme at the beginning of 2009, the operation resulted in seizures totalling 4,630 specimens of over 80 species of wildlife protected by CITES! This example can be strengthened by another: Customs seizures in several countries led to the confiscation of over 23 tons of ivory in 2009 – a record high in history.

In order to support Customs' efforts to protect wildlife and reduce biodiversity losses, the WCO has been mobilizing its tools and programmes. Let me mention some examples. To start with, the Harmonized System – the international goods nomenclature managed by the WCO – has been amended to enable Customs officers to identify and monitor traded species covered by CITES. We also maintain a database of global seizure records in the WCO Customs Enforcement Network (CEN), which helps Customs administrations to identify trends in the illicit trade in CITES and the modus operandi of environmental criminals. Furthermore, the WCO Secretariat has developed detailed risk indicators on endangered species to support frontline Customs officers in their daily operations. At the regional level, the WCO Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices (RILO) have been very active in environmental border protection by collecting and analyzing seizure information while the WCO

capacity building and regional training network has been hosting training events, using the WCO e-learning platform and organizing capacity building initiatives.

On top of all these efforts, it is imperative that the WCO and its Member Customs administrations continue to strengthen and enhance cooperation and communication with our partners in the fight against transnational environmental crime, including national environmental agencies and related international organizations. Since 2001, the WCO has been an active partner in the Green Customs Initiative (GCI), a series of collaborative activities to train Customs officers with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including CITES. We have jointly organized a series of training sessions which were highly appreciated by Customs administrations in terms of gaining knowledge and acquiring contact with their Green Customs partners.

Moreover, the WCO has invited these partners to join its internet-based global real-time communication tool, called ENVIRONET. It provides a secure platform for officers and experts from Customs, environmental protection authorities, police, other law enforcement agencies, and international organizations as well as their regional networks to cooperate with one another and share real-time information in the course of their daily operations. Since its launch on 5 June 2009, ENVIRONET now has more than 970 registered users from over 110 countries and international organizations, with most exchanged messages focusing on wildlife.

As these examples show, the WCO Secretariat has been working very closely with the CITES Secretariat and other partners to protect the environment and combat environment-related crime. Our partners are also regular participants at sessions of the WCO Enforcement Committee and add tremendous value to discussions in the Customs community. This exchange of information enriches our efforts and empowers the Customs community; enabling us to tackle environmental crime more effectively and with as many tools as possible.

To conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to all our CITES partners for their valued support in helping Customs to discharge its responsibility in this area, in addition, I would like to renew my commitment to work together with CITES and others as we have a shared responsibility to protect the planet and its natural bounty for future generations. Indeed our alliance to protect the environment and promote biodiversity will advance as we continue to support, cooperate and dialogue with one another in a spirit characterised by mutual respect.

I wish you every success in your deliberations in the coming days.

Thank you for your attention.



More information
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