

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

Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Lausanne (Switzerland), 9 to 20 October 1989

Interpretation and Application of the Convention

Trade in African Elephant Ivory

Stocks of Ivory in Burundi and Djibouti

COMMUNICATION FROM THE BURUNDI DELEGATION

Burundi is happy and proud to sit for the first time as full member at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Washington Convention.

Two years ago, when the same meeting was held in Ottawa, the situation was very different. In fact, not only was Burundi not yet a member of CITES, but it was still classed among the countries that were least dedicated to the cause of nature conservation. One could even say that Burundi was well on the way to becoming CITES' number one enemy. This situation was due principally to Burundi having become a centre for the traffic in ivory. Friends of nature, in general, and of the African elephant, in particular, publicly and very emphatically condemned Burundi for this.

Shortly after the Ottawa meeting, however, very important changes took place in Burundi. Notably, on September 3rd, 1987, the regime in which CITES had been so disappointed was toppled by a coup d'Etat, which brought the present administration to power.

The new authorities in Burundi have demonstrated a political willingness, unprecedented in our history, to favour nature conservation. This has been proved by the creation of a ministerial department to deal with regional development, the environment and tourism.

But let us go back to how our relationship with CITES has developed. There, too, it is satisfying to note that Burundi's highest authorities have also decided to turn over a new leaf by putting a stop to the lenient ways of the deposed regime, in particular to the illegal trading in ivory.

I REVIEW OF THE SITUATION

1) November 1987

On November 5th, 1987, the Burundi Government decided to ban trading in ivory as well as its transit through its territory. This deliberate decision illustrated the new regime's determination to break with the former procedures which were contrary to the acceptable principles for

trade in endangered species. Once taken, this decision was circulated and brought to the attention of the international community and, in particular, to the CITES Secretariat. An inventory of the existing stocks of ivory was immediately undertaken and they were then put under surveillance.

2) March 1988

On March 29th, 1988, the Deputy Secretary General of CITES went to Burundi to formally record the measure, to discuss the consequences of the ban and to determine what was to be done with the stocks of ivory present in Burundi so that the dossier on Burundi's ivory could be definitively closed.

3) April 1988

On the occasion of the WWF Workshop for the African Elephant in Lusaka, the Director General of the National Institute for Nature Conservation had to convey orally the terms of the banning measure taken by the Government of Burundi. The international authorities for the conservation of nature who were present recognized the measure but did not suggest as yet a solution for the existing stocks.

Some of them expressed surprise that the measure came at a time when they were seeking to apply sanctions to force Burundi to ban trading in ivory, in accordance with the decision of the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES held in Ottawa in July 1987.

Others remained sceptical about the measure in light of Burundi's long history of illegal trading in ivory and were waiting for the test of time to confirm the seriousness of the decision.

Finally, the African Range Group, along with some of the other Workshop participants, felt that Burundi should be congratulated on its courageous action and should be authorized to dispose of its ivory stocks in accordance with CITES regulations so that it could resolve the problem rapidly and definitively.

4) June 1988

On June 26th, 1988, the President of the Republic of Burundi signed the decree to become a member of CITES, thus marking Burundi's support for the community of nature conservationists and its determination to contribute to the preservation of endangered species.

5) July 1988

The strict control of ivory was organized. All ivory imported after November 5th 1987 was confiscated by the government, which took charge of guarding all existing stocks, without exception.

Seals were attached to all stocks, both seized and private, to avoid any illegal manipulation of them. These stocks were then stored in safe places under government surveillance, awaiting a solution in accordance with CITES recommendations.

6) August 1988

At the Government of Burundi's invitation, the CITES Secretariat returned to the country and recognized the serious nature of the measures taken.

7) October 1988

When invited to the first meeting of the African Elephant Working Group, the Burundi delegation was able to explain to the participants its wish to rapidly find an adequate solution for moving the existing stocks. The general consensus that emerged from this meeting was the possibility of the legal sale of the confiscated ivory in a manner previously agreed upon by Burundi and CITES. Moreover, the government accepted that the proceeds of the sale be totally given over to financing nature conservation projects in Burundi.

Unfortunately, because of the numerous bans on importing ivory and the withdrawal of the middlemen from the non-producing countries, this project could not be realized.

9) July 1989

The second meeting of the African Elephant Working Group in Gaborone was an occasion for everyone to study the problems connected with the ivory trade today more closely.

II BURUNDI'S POINT OF VIEW

- 1) Since November 5th, 1987, Burundi has permanently banned trading in ivory on its territory.
- 2) The government has considered any stocks of ivory introduced into the country before this measure to be private property.
- 3) All stocks fraudulently introduced into the country after November 5th, 1987 have been seized and confiscated by the government.
- 4) For the latter category, the government was able to obtain authorization for its sale under CITES regulations and has accepted that the proceeds of its sale be entirely given over to nature conservation projects.
- 5) For the privately owned stocks, the Government of Burundi asks the present meeting to understand Burundi's position:
 - a) given that the banning measure does not allow trading in ivory of any sort, only the government can proceed with the disposal of this product;
 - b) and given that the government itself, as a dedicated member of CITES, will need CITES authorization to act.
- 6) Consequently, the Government of Burundi thanks CITES for its help in resolving the problem of the confiscated ivory, and hopes to meet the same understanding concerning the non-confiscated stocks.

The present Government of Burundi has shown a lot of patience and has been able to demonstrate that, in future, it intends to play fair with CITES. Therefore, it hopes it has deserved the support of all the members of the CITES family - a family it is proud to be a member of. Burundi unreservedly supports all efforts taken the world over in favour of the protection of endangered species, and especially those taken for an effective and lasting protection of the African elephant.

III ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BURUNDI IN FAVOUR OF NATURE CONSERVATION

The willingness of the Government of Burundi to initiate actions in favour of nature conservation has been demonstrated by the creation of two institutions: the Ministry for Development, Tourism and the Environment, and the National Institute for the Environment and the Conservation of Nature.

Instituted on October 19th, 1988, the new Ministry for Development, Tourism and the Environment is not only responsible for regional agricultural development but also for acting in favour of nature conservation and protecting species of flora and fauna in danger of extinction from their biotopes which have not yet been damaged by man's presence.

Instituted in March 1980, The National Institute for the Conservation of Nature has been entrusted with the mission of protecting the national parks and natural reserves, which include primary rain forest, primitive gallery forest and dry secondary forest. Its task involves assuring total protection to these biotopes that have been defended since colonial times but are now in danger of damage from human activities.

With the creation of the new Ministry, this Institute has also been given the task of co-ordinating the actions in favour of environmental protection. This is why it is now called the National Institute for the Environment and the Conservation of Nature. After Burundi joined the Convention in June 1988 this Institute was also given the authority to manage trophies under the terms of the same Convention, and it is also the national focal point for UNEP at the moment. As well as its activities concerning protected biotopes, this Institute has initiated an agro-forestry programme in the region of the protected parks and reserves in order to put forest and agro-forest plant species at the local population's disposal with a view to discouraging them from using the protected primary forests for firewood and timber. Moreover, it will work at developing these parks and reserves and creating trails and shelters with a view to developing the tourist industry.