

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



Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Geneva (Switzerland), 17-28 August 2019

MRU-FREETOWN DECLARATION ON COUNTERING THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE
WITHIN THE SUBREGION

This document has been submitted by Sierra Leone in relation to agenda item 34.*

* *The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.*

June 2019

MRU-FREETOWN DECLARATION ON COUNTERING THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE WITHIN THE SUBREGION



We, the representatives of the four Mano River Union (MRU) member states of Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, having participated at the "Countering Illegal Wildlife Trade" Workshop, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, on 18-19 June 2019:

AWARE

-that the Upper Guinea Rainforests constitute the third largest rainforest block in the world and that wild fauna and flora species from MRU form an integral and irreplaceable part of humanity's natural heritage and are worth protecting for future generations;

RECOGNISING

-that numerous species in the MRU subregion—including rosewoods, African elephants, African pangolins, African grey parrots, leopards, African vultures, chimpanzees, manatees, sea turtles, sharks, and rays—are threatened with extinction as a result of illegal exploitation and illegal trade;

FURTHER RECOGNISING

-that damage to ecosystems caused by illegal exploitation and illegal trade in fauna and flora has a negative impact on the economies and livelihoods of communities across West Africa;



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



UK in Sierra Leone

AWARE

-that illegal exploitation and trafficking of wildlife, involving transnational organized criminal networks, undermine good governance and the rule of law;

AWARE

-that the Upper Guin

ALSO, AWARE

-that the MRU sub-region is also a transit area along trade routes used for trafficking wildlife specimens sourced from other regions of the world;

CONCERNED

-that rangers are losing their lives in the battle against poachers armed with sophisticated weaponry;

COMMITTED

-to supporting mechanisms adopted by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to address the illegal trade and trafficking of wildlife;

RECALLING

-the Dakar Declaration on the Development of Subregional Wildlife Enforcement Collaboration adopted in Dakar, Senegal, 15-17 March 2016;

FURTHER RECALLING

-the Rio+20 Declaration, “The Future We Want”, endorsed by the UN General Assembly, which “recognized the economic, social and environmental impacts of illicit trafficking in wildlife, where firm and strengthened action needs to be taken on both the supply and demand sides”;

SUPPORTIVE

-of the African Union’s African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa adopted in May 2015;

APPLAUDING

-the achievements of joint wildlife crime enforcement initiatives across other African subregions, including the Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF), the Horn of Africa Wildlife Enforcement Network (HA-WEN), the Wildlife Enforcement Network for Southern Africa (WEN-SA), and the Central Africa Wildlife Enforcement Network coordinated through the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC);

CONVINCED

-that the most effective way to combat illegal trade in wild fauna and flora in West Africa is through a coordinated subregional response; and

ALSO CONVINCED

-of the need to establish partnerships between National Forestry and Wildlife agencies and their National Security counterparts, including associated coordination mechanisms, in order to achieve concrete results in combating illegal trade in wild fauna and flora in the MRU sub region.

CONSIDERING

-that the 15th Protocol on Peace, Security and Defence and the cross-border strategy of the MRU are legal institutional frameworks that speak to both issues of trans-border security and natural resources governance.

WE CALL UPON THE MANO RIVER UNION NATIONS:

1. **To deepen continuous cross-border collaboration, coordination, and cooperation on operations and activities:**

- Officials at all levels should actively maintain routine dialogue with their counterparts in neighbouring countries, in order to inform operational activity and maximise shared understanding.
- Confidential intelligence on IWT should be shared timely, openly, and routinely between MRU member states, with the necessary handling frameworks to be agreed upon between national intelligence agencies.
- Nations should establish bilateral MOUs allowing joint patrols in the disputed border areas, which currently provide ungoverned havens for illegal trade in wildlife (IWT) criminals.

2. **To draft policy and legislation in an explicitly regional context:**

- A framework for cross-border cooperation between MRU member states should be established.
- MRU should establish a regional task force to implement the framework and coordinate the implementation of recommendations following the 2019 Freetown Declaration. This task force will develop and embed MRU networks for combating wildlife trade (CWT).
- Legislation across the MRU must be harmonised to allow the successful pursuit, apprehension, and conviction of criminals operating across borders and exploiting disparities.
- The MRU should be used frequently as a representative body for joint engagement beyond the subregion, magnifying the shared national concern and acting as a source of resolution.
- The MRU should encourage Member States to implement all necessary measures and commit relevant resources for them to move their legislation from Category 3 to Category 1 in CITES.
- The MRU should engage technical and financial partners to generate resources and implement capacity strengthening of CITES stakeholders.
- Creative solutions for funding CWT should be promoted, including encouraging countries to establish national funds from taxes and seizures of money from IWT.
- The gathering of security and environment stakeholders should be formalised into annual or biannual meetings to assess national progress and revise targets for strengthening the fight against IWT.

3. To ensure the security sector works with and among the population and broader stakeholders:

- Joint border security and confidence building units should be used to generate shared purpose and ownership between the security sector and local communities and increase operational success.
- Suitable revenue-generating initiatives must be developed and implemented to replace local communities' reliance on unsustainable wildlife exploitation.
- Private finance companies and banks should be engaged to help understand the nature and flow of IWT finance.

4. To improve national level coordination:

- The nations should encourage a joint, collaborative approach to IWT operations among their own security sector institutions and Ministerial Departments and Agencies.
- CITES Management authorities should lead and be provided with resources to help law enforcement agencies implement national awareness-raising strategies for wildlife conservation.