



Our ref.:JMS/WWW
Your ref.:

His Excellency Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India
Prime Minister's Office – Room 152
South Block
NEW DELHI 11001
India

Geneva, 12 April 2005

Your Excellency,

India was the twenty-fifth nation State to become a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

India has always played a very active role in the implementation of CITES, at a national, regional and international level. It has been both a member of the Standing Committee and a host country for a meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The CITES Secretariat has enjoyed a long and close working relationship with India's national CITES Management Authority. India's biodiversity is known and treasured throughout the world and its various habitats contain several examples of the world's most endangered animal and plant species. In the case of animals, in particular, the population numbers of 'flagship' species such as the Royal Bengal tiger and Asian elephant are important indicators for not only the health of India's wildlife but they also serve as pointers towards the health of our planet as a whole and the success, or otherwise, of the conservation efforts of *homo sapiens*.

It has been my pleasure and privilege to see both tigers and elephants in the wild in India. It is, therefore, with considerable personal and professional concern that I have learned recently of the results of initial surveys in some tiger reserves in India indicating what appears to be an alarming reduction in tiger numbers.

As you may know, CITES as a whole, and especially the CITES Secretariat, has worked closely with officials in India to try to tackle illegal trade in wildlife and to combat the looting of your country's natural resources. For example, in 2002 a major training course was held at the National Police Academy of India, involving wildlife law enforcement officials from 12 countries in Asia. Even before the recent disturbing tiger population survey reports, we had started planning a meeting of the CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force. This will take place in New Delhi in May 2005 and will bring together CITES, Customs and police officers from China, India and Nepal to exchange information and criminal intelligence and to help design strategies for increasing cross-border cooperation and coordination of investigations.

Whilst there have been positive initiatives, such as those described above, the CITES Secretariat has for some time, however, had concerns as to whether the coordination and collaboration between some of India's agencies with a responsibility for wildlife law enforcement has been as effective as it might be; especially in the face of what appears to be a highly organized nature to much of the wildlife crime that India suffers. We have made these concerns known to the relevant CITES officials in India and have regularly offered technical advice and support. In response, officials of the Government of India have repeatedly assured the CITES Secretariat, the Standing Committee and the Conference of the Parties that

our recommendations were being followed and, in particular, that a specialized wildlife crime unit was being established. It seems, for reasons unknown to us however, that internal developments have either not taken place or that such work is moving slowly.

In December 2004 a recommendation was issued by the Standing Committee, on behalf of the Conference of the Parties, to suspend trade with India because of its failure to provide information regarding its progress in developing legislation for implementation of the Convention. Fortunately, we were able to withdraw the recommendation in March of this year. India is currently in arrears regarding its contributions to the CITES Trust Fund.

We have also noted that the State of Jammu and Kashmir continues to engage in the processing of wool of the highly-endangered Tibetan antelope, which our research clearly indicates is smuggled into India from China where many thousands of these animals have been poached in recent years.

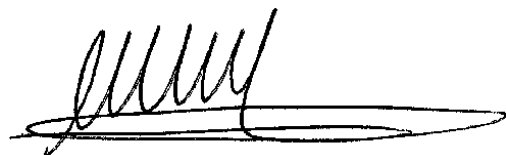
It would be possible to interpret some of the above points as indicative of a lessening of India's commitment to CITES.

I wish to stress, however, that my purpose in writing is not to criticize India or its officials but to offer the support of the CITES Secretariat as your country responds to these disturbing reports from tiger reserves. I believe that this office is ideally placed to provide technical expertise and to help facilitate the communication and coordination that will be needed to combat and target the poaching that occurs in India, the cross-border smuggling and the final destinations where consumers create a demand for your natural resources. Not only do my staff and I stand ready to assist but the CITES Secretariat may be able to assist in coordinating the support that I know can also be called upon from governments and non-governmental organizations around the world.

In early 2000, I had the pleasure to meet in New Delhi with Mr Ram Jethmalani, the then Cabinet Minister for Law, Justice and Company Affairs and he indicated that he shared many of my concerns and agreed with many of my proposals.

Your Excellency, I respectfully request you, at your earliest convenience, to grant me a personal audience with you where we can discuss these issues and determine how best CITES and the international community can come to India's aid. Your country remains the world's stronghold of many of Earth's most endangered species; none more so than the Royal Bengal tiger. It will be a tragedy of the utmost proportions if India's tiger populations are allowed to fall any lower and a striking indictment upon all our conservation efforts. CITES is not willing for such a charge to be laid against it and I am confident that neither is India. I sincerely hope that you will agree to meet with me and I am ready to travel to India whenever is convenient for you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Wijnstekers', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Willem Wijnstekers
Secretary-General

cc: CITES Management Authority of India and the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva.