

Statement by his Excellency hon. Daniel T. Arap Moi, C.G.h., M.P., President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kenya

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the government and people of Kenya and on my own behalf, I welcome you to Nairobi on the occasion of the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). Over the years the Convention has provided the required safeguards to endangered species the world over. From the smallest to the largest and therein lies its inherent value.

CITES member States have the responsibility of ensuring that today's varieties of flora and fauna are protected and preserved for our children and posterity. That is our common obligation and we should not fall short.

This Conference will debate Resolutions that will have a major impact on the future of our wildlife and the world's other threatened species. It will also discuss Resolutions that aim to provide adequate protection for plants and animals that are traded internationally. In the poorer nations of the world, such trade can represent significant earnings and consequently strict regulation becomes essential.

Many species no longer survive in the numbers that can sustain unregulated or illegal trade. Our biggest challenge in the new Millennium is to ensure that CITES remains relevant and able to expand into new areas to cover emerging issues. It will be interesting to discuss the role of CITES in relation to the other international trade regimes and organizations. Can CITES remain independent, and entirely separate, particularly in view of the direct correlation between the protection of species and trade? Might it not be more productive to co-ordinate some of the activities of CITES with others?

The current difficulties with trade in hardwood timber, commercial fisheries of endangered species such as tuna, and the debate on whaling are all important indicators.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The future of the world's elephants are a matter of extreme concern but so too is the fate of Africa's great apes and the impact of trade for certain birds, reptiles, insects, plants, fish, mammals and many others.

Although we in Kenya have strong views, I am sure the Conference will once again rise to the occasion and provide guidance on how best to use and enhance CITES to provide adequate safeguards against further species loss.

I will however, draw your attention to some issues that call for your immediate attention and that arise from your last session. In particular the Conference should ensure that any Resolutions that are agreed are specific, targeted and appropriately defined. Similarly, those Resolutions that for a variety of reasons have not served their purposes should be reviewed and improved.

That will limit misinterpretation and abuse by those that are interested in exploiting any opening to satisfy their greed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When a one off-sale of ivory was granted to some States by the 10th meeting of the sometimes back, it was expected that this action would not negatively affect efforts in elephant conservation. Part of the compromise decision was related to the urgent development and implementation of a working Africa-based monitoring system.

This has not yet happened. We in Kenya see evidence that the illegal killing of elephants has increased while no reliable monitoring system has been put in place.

Conservation be it through comprehensive protection or on user rights is expensive and many countries have difficulties in providing adequate oversight of international laws on species protection. I am pointing this out because one tends to forget that actions in one country can significantly affect the situation in others.

The agreement allowing limited ivory trade now appears to have had a negative impact on both elephant mortality and illegal ivory trade. This has significantly raised management and enforcement costs in some countries including Kenya.

I hope that this Conference will find an acceptable solution to this problem with a view to reconciling the economic uses of wildlife eco-tourism and conservation. Tourism is a major component of Kenya's economy and the number of tourists visiting our parks is directly correlated to the aesthetic and public image of the national parks.

The problem of poaching and related anti-poaching operations are by nature not tourist friendly and have adversely affected our tourist industry.

We also need to re-examine the actions already taken to improve species protection but which have not had any immediate remedial effect. In particular I draw your attention to the system of monitoring the illegal killing of elephants (MIKE) which was developed without adequate consultation and to-date is not truly representative of CITES membership.

It is seen as a flawed and financially prohibited system for developing countries like ours. I am aware that substantial funds have already been used on the collection of data on elephant populations and illegal international trade in ivory, which might be commendable. However, MIKE as currently structured, will not provide the data required until after six years. This obviously is an especially long time for an endangered species.

It will be more prudent to have urgent funding priority to prevent elephant poaching, enhance enforcement capacity and improve elephant security.

I am afraid establishing expensive programmes for monitoring elephant populations alone is totally inadequate. Instead we should expand the mandates of existing mechanisms to take on new functions. In Africa we could, without much difficulty and with the support of others, establish a bureau within the already existing Lusaka agreement to take over the database and monitoring ideas of MIKE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kenya is concerned that the States party to the CITES Convention have not yet defined the term "appropriate and acceptable" destination.

We would like to see serious discussion as to whether the exporting or importing country should define these terms and also whether re-exports should be included. The agreement does not give guidelines on how to deal with these ambiguities leaving it open to abuse by those involved in illegal trade.

You will be aware that the trade in live animals involves their shipment from their natural habitat to a different location.

We appeal to the Parties to the Convention to handle transfers carefully and take into account the term 'prepare' as used in articles iii, iv and v, of the Convention, in all processes from capture to the point of export. The Parties should ensure that the treatment of animals during the entire process, from the initial capture to export, will "minimize the risk of injury, damage to health, or cruel treatment".

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, legal trade in species should not be allowed to continue unchecked as this is likely to defeat the whole purpose of conservation of flora and fauna. It is up to range States to provide information on the levels of illegal killing of elephants, illegal ivory trade and to relate the information to CITES decisions.

In this regard, Kenya has put forward a proposal seeking amendment of the conditions of the 10th Conference of the Parties for the resumption of ivory trade, which have not been fully implemented. We hold the view that no ivory trade should be permitted under any circumstances until such a time as an effective monitoring capacity is established and is operational. I am hopeful that the Conference will accord the proposal serious consideration.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have my best wishes for a useful and productive session and a new century marked by new initiatives in the environmental field. I wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you.

Address by the Chairman of the CITES Standing Committee

Executive Director, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Gathered in this wonderful conference hall this evening are at least 1,000 members of the most prolific, widely distributed, and demanding and in the end most beautiful species on our planet – *homo sapiens sapiens*. Out there are another 6 billion or so of us, most of whom are materially poor, living hard lives. Many are dependent on wildlife for survival – for food, for fuel, for medicine, for additional income to give their children the chance of a better life through decent healthcare and education.

There are those who claim there is a conflict between protecting wildlife and meeting human needs. But all my experience working in conservation for more than 20 years is that human and wildlife needs are inter-dependent. *Homo sapiens* depends on all the other species with whom we are linked in the biological chain of life. [Rivets analogy].

For many species it is of course true that humans have spelt destruction – through habitat loss, re-introduction and excessive trade. Yet there is hope because humans also have the unique capacity to comprehend the problems they have caused, and begin to solve them.

CITES is one of the crucial tools aiding us in our drive for these solutions. CITES is of course a species of MEA (Multilateral Environmental Agreement). Like many of the species it conserves, CITES is one of the most charismatic and larger beasts in the 'MEA Forest' – which must in fact be one of the few forests whose growth has been untrammelled in recent years. Many of the MEAs were conceived by the two great United Nations environmental conferences – the first in Stockholm (in 1970) and the second at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. CITES belongs to the first, Stockholm generation of environmental treaties. Along the 30-year road from Stockholm, CITES has acquired 150 Parties (most of the world) and a formidable record for effective, direct action to protect and conserve endangered animals and plants.

The CITES species has survived and flourished for three main reasons. First, because it is based on a single, simple, practical concept; the regulation of trade in all threatened species, and prohibition of trade in the most endangered. Upon this spare but sound framework you the Parties, with the assistance of scientists and NGOs, have built a practical, working convention through the Resolutions and Decisions taken at the 10 previous COPS, and the many more meetings of the Standing Committee, its predecessor the Technical Committee, the Animals Committee and the Plants Committee – and several more but I will spare you the whole list!

This ability of the Convention to evolve is the second reason for its success over the last three decades. CITES has adapted itself to the new world ushered in by Rio – where sustainable use conducted humanely and rationally is a common denominator linking the whole conservation community. CITES has to manage human need for animal and plant products in such a way that both wildlife and people benefit – the elusive win/win objective for which we strive, taking account of the individual circumstances of each species.

The Significant Trade process, managed so ably by fellow Chairmen Hank Jenkins and Margarita Clemente on the Animals and Plants Committee is the key to achieving this objective, ensuring that species after species can be a valuable and sustainable natural resource. The process is not complete – and is indeed iterative. For example many believe that CITES-listed species such as sturgeon and musk deer could benefit from inclusion in the Significant Trade process, and that currently unlisted species such as sharks also need to be harvested more carefully.

Whilst I am on the subject of threatened species, I will digress a few moments to mention a marvellous new publication, which I would commend to you all, and which provided some of the inspiration for my address. It is called *Global Biodiversity – Earth's Living Resources in the 21st Century*. It was published a few weeks ago by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) – which is now to become a fully integrated centre of excellence providing wildlife information and capacity building services for UNEP and the global wildlife conventions. WCMC's new publication is a mine of information. For example, people sometimes grumble that CITES spends too much time on large mammals – elephants, rhinos, tigers, whales. One of the reasons for this is of course the interest and awe which such creatures arouse globally. But another, more rational reason for CITES' interest is that one quarter of all mammals are threatened with extinction according to IUCN. CITES also spends a good deal of time dealing with the next most threatened group – birds where 10% of species are in IUCN Red Data Book category of 'threatened'.

For me WCMC's new book also reminded that my own country (UK) contains a very modest amount of biodiversity – 50 mammals, 230 birds and 1623 plants to be exact, less than 2000 in all. WCMC have established a biodiversity index, and the UK scores – 1.003. By contrast, I flew here via Uganda which has over 6,500 species, and a biodiversity index of 0.624. If I had flown on to South Africa I would have been in a country with one of the richest legacies of biodiversity – a staggering 24,000 species and an Index of 0.915. These figures do, of course, illustrate why CITES and the other wildlife conventions with which we increasingly cooperate through UNEP – especially the Convention on Biological Diversity and Migrating Species – need to focus their efforts on capacity building in developing countries, and to address common issues such as the sustainable use of bushmeat and the conservation of sea turtles which can in my view only be addressed through combined action by CITES and other international bodies.

I now return to my central theme. The third reason for CITES success is all of you, and your predecessors over the last 30 years. For the hard slog of licensing work you do in CITES Management and Scientific Authorities everywhere. For the testing and often dangerous work you and your colleagues at home do in enforcing the Convention at ports, airports, nature reserves, shops. More and more emphasis is being given by UNEP and other international agencies to environmental crime: one of the best developed systems of combating a form of that crime – wildlife crime – has come about as a result of CITES. This is an area where the newer MEAs can benefit from our example, although CITES itself tends to do more to ensure that it becomes less and less worthwhile for criminals to trade in endangered species – to traffic in extinction.

It has therefore been a real privilege for me to chair the Convention Standing Committee for the last 3 years. I shall be giving you a report of the Committee's work tomorrow so I'll save that story for then. But this is an opportunity for me to say thank you to those who have inspired or assisted me in the last three years, and indeed in my 17 years association with the Convention. For inspiration I would like to thank Professor Nicholas Mrosovsky of the University of Toronto, Holly Dublin, Chair of the IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group and Tom Milliken of TRAFFIC, for their principled commitment to science, conservation and sustainable development. I would also like to thank Dr Barbara Maas for reminding me that good ethics and good science can also be compatible. I thank Professor Reuben Olembo of Kenya, former Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, for helping to rescue CITES in its darkest hour two years ago. I thank Jim Armstrong for his constant Australian good humour for helping to see CITES, and me, through some of those dark days. I thank the new Secretary-General Willem Wijnstekers, and the Enforcement Officer John Sellar for their good company and advice during our recent tiger missions on behalf of the Convention to India, Japan and China. And finally I would like to thank you, Executive Director, for another rescue act – in offering to host this conference at Gigiri when our first venue fell through and now for delivering such a wonderful environment for our conference. I intend to enjoy it – and I hope we'll all look back to this Conference as one where work and fun were in perfect harmony.

Speech by the Executive Director of UNEP

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I extend a warm welcome to all of you to the 11th session of the Conference of the Parties to the CITES. I welcome you to Nairobi and wish you an enjoyable stay here amid the gentle and generous people of Kenya and the beautiful country in which they live. I also thank you all for being with us during the 'Moment of Reflection' event at the Memorial Garden. This memorial garden makes visible our dedication to peace and to cooperation. It is symbolic of our vision of the new culture of solidarity between humankind in all parts of the world, with the future generations and also the solidarity between humankind and nature.

At the outset, on behalf of all of you, I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of Kenya for their support in organizing this Conference. For more than a quarter of a century, this beautiful country has been the host to the United Nations Environment Programme – the global environmental guardian and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements – the City Agency of the United Nations system.

Africa is most important to the United Nations Environment Programme. We firmly believe that our location in Nairobi, in Kenya is a huge asset and not a barrier in our work. In all parts of Africa, there are points of new hope and dynamism, which need to be built upon. There is now an element of vision and determined commitment amongst its leaders, entrepreneurs and the members of its civil society. We need to think and plan consistently for Africa's restoration to dynamic development, characterized by peace, a pattern of sustainable development and an end to poverty.

Excellencies,

As we begin the 11th Meeting of the Parties to CITES, it is important to note in nearly twenty five years of its existence, CITES has evolved into a significant force in wildlife conservation. In the last quarter century, its membership has expanded to include 150 Parties. At the same time, it has greatly matured in stature. CITES is generally seen as the most successful of all international treaties to conserve wildlife.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you the new Secretary-General of CITES – Mr. Willem Wijnstekers who assumed his responsibilities in April last year. I am pleased to inform you that the CITES Secretariat has now succeeded in overcoming its difficulties of 1997/1998. The working of the Secretariat is now characterized by greater productivity and harmony.

I hope you will all support the Secretary-General's intention to provide the Parties with a professional and proactive Secretariat that the Convention and the Parties deserve. I am happy to learn that the Parties have agreed to the Secretary-General's proposals to strengthen the Secretariat in priority areas of enforcement and capacity building.

Last year the CITES Secretariat contributed importantly to the efforts to improve synergies between Multilateral Environmental Agreements. I am also pleased with the efforts by the Secretariat to enhance the involvement in CITES implementation in West and Central francophone Africa and with the very positive outcome of regional meetings in Asia and Central and South America and the Caribbean.

Excellencies,

This meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES is an important one for several reasons. Firstly, the range of animals and plants that is proposed for amendment in Appendices I and II. There are 62 proposals with some 50 different species to be considered, including such species that have attracted major media and public attention as the elephants, the turtles, the whales and the sharks. There is

another key conservation issue that must be addressed. These include matters relating to leopards, markhors (wild goats), bears and more.

Secondly, a major achievement of this Conference will be the adoption of the proposed Strategic Vision through 2005. This is the first time in the Convention's history that Parties have set out to chart the way forward for the Convention. It is necessary that the Convention focuses on a limited number of priority goals, such as:

- To enhance its ability to implement and enforce the Convention;
- To strengthen the scientific basis for decisions;
- To reduce, if not, eliminate illegal trade;
- To enhance public support and participation;
- To improve involvement of international stakeholders;
- To provide the Convention with an improved and secure financial and administrative basis.

The focus of CITES must, first and foremost, be to ensure conservation through the wise use of biological resources; the safeguarding of the free services provided by species and ecosystems since they provide ecological 'free' services that could spur the future overall development process.

The integrated management of ecosystems for their sustainable utilization and equitable benefit sharing of biological resources has become the foundation of vibrant national economies with long-term economic growth potential.

This meeting should bear in mind that the major causes of biodiversity loss are well known. And included among them are the issues of:

- Over-harvesting of natural resources;
- Human population and migration pressure;
- Foreign debt servicing;
- Commercial land use practices;
- Habitat fragmentation through destruction leading to fragmented population of species;
- 'Public goods' nature of biodiversity which make exclusion of other users impossible;
- The underestimation of the true value of conservation as opposed to the anticipated, monetized benefits from development projects;
- The absence of markets to reflect the direct and indirect use values of biodiversity, and so on.

All these factors blend together to constitute enormous pressures on ecosystems and sustainable agricultural growth.

The challenge is to identify and address the real socio-economic causes and impacts of changes in biodiversity as well as develop effective strategic viable approaches to use the components of biological diversity in ways which do not lead to their long-term decline, whilst contributing to increasing production functions which underpin human progress.

I would like to take this opportunity to call on the countries to sign the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. I would also like to urge them to take necessary steps for the rapid ratification for its early entry into force of the Protocol.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The overall policy of the programmes of UNEP has been to make the environmental management of biodiversity an important part of, and fully integrated with, social and economic activities to ensure that environmental activities and development objectives become mutually supportive. Its main target is to support the achievement of the objectives of sustainable development and transform them into protocol policies and programmes.

CITES was one of 10 global multilateral environment agreements which were selected for analysis in UNEP's second Global Environment Outlook report, GEO-2000. This volume examined MEAs in terms of their implementation, compliance, effectiveness and reporting, at both the Global and Regional levels. Furthermore, a GEO Technical Report on mechanisms to assess the implementation, impact and effectiveness of major MEAs – including CITES – is currently under preparation.

UNEP also convened a workshop on enforcement and compliance related to MEAs in Geneva from 12 to 14 July last year. The workshop focused on illegal trade, environmental crime and violations of the provisions of CITES, and other MEAs. Experts from developed and developing countries, as well as countries with economies in transition, drawn from law enforcement, customs, prosecution and police participated in the workshop.

Within the CITES working group, experts examined the development, causes and extent of illegal trade and attempts to control such criminal activities. The Working Group also assessed the effectiveness of interagency cooperation both nationally and internationally. Among the recommendations made to improve enforcement and compliance at national and international levels was the need to develop guidelines for cooperation on compliance, enforcement and environmental crime. Another recommendation encouraged the development and implementation of regional agreements, such as the Lusaka Agreement on Cooperative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora. UNEP was requested to undertake leadership in the area of environmental crime, focusing, *inter alia*, on better and more effective coordination and cooperation among national enforcement authorities.

One of the major outcomes of this workshop has been the establishment in UNEP of an Enforcement of MEAs Unit to take the lead in the follow-up to the recommendations of the workshop.

The Working Group of Experts on Compliance and Enforcement held its first preparatory session to develop guidelines on enforcement of and compliance with MEAs in Geneva from 13 to 15 December 1999. The CITES Secretariat is also a participant in this Working Group. The outcome of the Working Group is being shared widely with the experts and governments to solicit their views and comments which will be compiled and synthesized by UNEP, and a revised document will be issued for further review and discussion at the next meeting scheduled for May 2000.

UNEP's Governing Council, at its 20th session, adopted a decision on the promotion of interlinkages among global environmental issues and human needs. Pursuant to this decision, UNEP convened three meetings on 'inter-linkages'.

UNEP and CITES are also collaborating in the preparation of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the massive agenda before it, this meeting of the Conference of the Parties must also give due attention to all the proposals on species on the table, no matter how big or small, how charismatic or otherwise.

I would like to end my speech with a quote from the Cree Indian Prophecy:

"Only after the last tree has been cut down, only after the last fish has been caught, only then will you find that money cannot be eaten".

I wish the meeting fruitful and productive deliberations.

Opening statement by Willem Wijnstekers, Secretary-General of CITES

Dr Toepfer, Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Hepworth, Chairman of the Standing Committee, your excellencies, members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Allow me to start my statement with a word of thanks to our host, Dr Toepfer, and the many people on his staff who, for many months, have sacrificed many days and nights and invested an enormous amount of energy into making this meeting possible. Those of you who know Gigiri will realize how much work has been done and how many creative solutions have been found and applied for this compound to be able to cope with a meeting of this size.

Dr Toepfer, on behalf of the CITES Secretariat - and I am sure I can also speak on behalf of all participants in our meeting - I should like to say that you and your staff have worked miracles. Our sincere thanks and congratulations go to you and your staff. The logistical support you are providing and the warm hospitality of the normal inhabitants of this compound create an ideal surrounding for the many participants in our meetings.

I should like to urge participants to reciprocate in their attitude towards our hosts, the many people that will be available for many long hours to assist them. We clearly are very welcome guests and that should be an additional reason to treat our hosts with due respect.

I also want to extend my sincere thanks to the Government of Kenya, the airport authorities and the city of Nairobi for the many measures taken to facilitate the meeting and to guarantee the security of delegates during their stay in Nairobi.

Ladies and gentlemen, in July of this year, the Convention will have been in force for 25 years, which makes CITES one of the oldest multilateral environmental agreements. With its 151 Parties and because of its field of activity, it has also been one of the Conventions with the most direct impact on species conservation. That partly explains the enormous interest of Parties, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations and the media for the discussions that will take place from tomorrow onwards until the 20th of April. The fact that the Parties have again succeeded in tabling proposals that are subject to a wide variety of opinions and convictions and which touch upon deeply rooted principles, held and cherished by so many diverse countries and groupings, is of course also responsible for this high level of interest. The first skirmishes have already taken place in the media and in a series of preparatory meetings that have led up to this event and I for one am well aware of the fact that the stakes for many of you are high.

You may not have thought about this yet, but this eleventh meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties is the first of forty meetings to be held in the twenty-first century and the first of four hundred to be held in this new millennium. To realize this puts things in the right perspective, but there is no reason to underestimate the importance of the meeting we are about to start. This meeting is in fact going to be crucial as it will determine the direction in which the Convention will go, or not go, in the years to come.

The many decisions we need to take together in the coming weeks will indeed have a lasting impact on the future functioning of the Convention. Of direct relevance to that future is of course the proposal for a 'Strategic Vision through 2005', an ambitious strategic plan with the subtitle: 'International Trade in any Wild Fauna and Flora shall be Sustainable'. The purpose of the plan is to ensure that no animal or plant becomes or remains subject to unsustainable exploitation because of international trade. That this is easier said than done is something we of course all know and therefore the plan focuses on a small number of absolute priorities. When implemented with a sufficient level of commitment and effort by all Parties, the Secretariat and our many partners in the conservation community, the plan will result in the

enhanced ability of Parties to implement the Convention. It will strengthen the scientific basis for both national and international decision-taking processes and lead to a greater understanding of the Convention. It should also bring us a step closer to full global membership and lead to increased co-operation and strategic alliances with international stakeholders. The reduction of illegal trade and the ultimate elimination thereof is one of the most obvious aims of the plan. I am glad it also addresses the need to provide the Convention with an improved and secure financial and administrative basis.

The proposed strategic plan is accompanied by a detailed action plan that will be used as a checklist that will allow you to keep an eye on the follow-up by all involved. That action plan is therefore an essential tool to measure the level of implementation of the plan in the years to come.

I strongly urge you to adopt the plan and to participate actively in its accomplishment.

Ladies and gentlemen, during the twenty-one years that I have been involved in CITES, I have always been struck by the incredible level of personal commitment that so many of you show each and every day to the implementation and enforcement of the Convention. I have in fact often found that difficult to understand in the light of the many recounts of the continuing low level of political, and thus the low level of financial, commitment allocated to nature conservation. I am afraid that nature conservation is too rarely a policy priority.

I am proud of the fact that with the help of a small number of important donors, we have been able to fully sponsor the participation in this meeting of no less than 215 participants from 108 Parties. But when I tell you that I saw delegations of twenty and more people from some of the same countries at last years' WTO-meeting in Seattle, you will understand the point I am trying to make about political priorities.

I should therefore like to pay a special tribute to all of you and your colleagues at home who under difficult - and for some even dangerous - circumstances, dedicate not only their professional but in many cases much of their private lives to CITES and species conservation in the field. Their struggle is our struggle and without them this Convention would be meaningless.

To address the issue of political commitment is, however, not only the task of individual countries. It clearly also is a collective task for CITES itself. CITES is a very difficult Convention to understand, implement and enforce and we need to give a lot more attention to simplification. Through a long series of Resolutions and Decisions we have in many cases complicated rather than simplified implementation and enforcement and in doing so, we may have alienated more Parties than stimulated.

What CITES needs in my view is to be able to better demonstrate to its Parties, to the trade and to the general public that it is not an unnecessary administrative burden without any visible benefits for species conservation or sustainable development. We need to show that CITES is a powerful instrument that is, on the one hand, capable of enforcing a relatively low number of necessary and democratically agreed international trade bans in certain endangered species and, on the other hand, provides a flexible multilateral tool to ensure the sustainability of international trade in a great many species of wild animals and plants.

It is not too difficult to imagine that without CITES and the multilateral legal framework it provides for international trade measures, there would have been an uncontrollable amount of unilateral measures and that the number of cases involving species conservation submitted to WTO would have been a multitude of what we have seen so far.

Where capacity building, scientific coordination, training, the development of legislation, enforcement efforts and many other important CITES activities are concerned, I believe there is a lot of scope for, what I like to call, 'applied synergy' with other multilateral environmental agreements, particular with those that are biodiversity-related. I have made a series of concrete proposals to that effect, which we

will get to discuss during this meeting and I am sure I can count on a positive response of my colleagues in these other Conventions.

In my first year as Secretary-General of your Convention I have given priority to strengthen the Secretariat, to make it more professional and a lot more proactive. This last year, the Secretariat has done quite a lot to produce faster, to make its products more accessible and the way it works more transparent. A few examples: we have used courier services to guarantee that all Parties received the species proposals for this meeting long in advance and we have intensified the use of the Internet. I hope Internet access will continue to become more widely available in developing countries as it unfortunately still is a tool of which only developed countries can take full advantage.

My colleagues in the Secretariat and I find it both a pleasure and a privilege to be in a position in which we can serve so many Parties in pursuing such a great cause. But we should like to give you the assistance and guidance that both you and that cause deserve. I am therefore glad that the proposed Strategic Vision specifically addresses the strengthening of the financial and administrative basis of the Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen, I know many of you have worked very hard for a very long time on proposals for the inclusion of species in one of the Convention's Appendices, for their transfer from one to the other Appendix, or for their deletion from the Appendices. Others, particularly the NGO community, have worked hard to generate support for, or opposition to these proposals. Depending on your positions on the many issues before us and the decisions you will take on them in the coming two weeks, people will call this meeting a great success, a total disaster, or something in between these two extremes.

Whatever the outcome will be for each and every one of us, I sincerely hope that this meeting will be a confirmation of the basic principle of the Convention about the need for international co-operation. I am sure all of you realize that this meeting is a two-and-a-half-yearly occasion for dialogue between thousands of people involved in nature conservation and I hope that you will fully exploit this rare opportunity, both during the meetings and at the many social events surrounding it.

Together with you, I look forward to many interesting debates and confrontations of opinions.

In doing so, we should constantly remind ourselves that a proper and positive dialogue must be based on mutual respect, no matter how great the differences of opinion, convictions and cultural backgrounds are. To confront different views and to then accept a democratic decision in favor of one or the other may sometimes be difficult and frustrating, but that is an essential element of any process of collective decision-taking and CITES should be no exception.

For this meeting, more than for previous ones, the Secretariat has sought to stimulate the discussion about species-related proposals well before the actual meeting. We have, in an early provisional assessment, pointed out what we considered strengths and weaknesses in proposals. In doing so, I think we have assisted proponents in further addressing what we considered possible flaws and this has led to the provision of additional supportive information by proponents. An equally important aim of the Secretariat's efforts was to assist Parties in forming their own positions. I am convinced we have achieved both aims and that, together with all your other sources of information, you now have a better basis for your decisions.

I should point out that to provide you with the assessments and recommendations concerned is not only within our mandate, it is an important task of the Secretariat laid down in the very text of the Convention. In carrying out this task, the Secretariat based itself on criteria that have been established by the Parties and we have rigorously applied these.

I have to say this for a number of reasons. First of all because – fortunately by a small number of Parties and NGO's - the Secretariat has been criticized for this more active role and secondly because individual staff members have been subject to undue criticism and pressure in the process. Of course I am aware

that this is all part of the game and – again – I realize that the stakes are high. It has, however, been known for long that it does not help to shoot the messenger.

The contents of the more than 60 species proposals, the comments on them by other Parties and those of amongst others IUCN and TRAFFIC, together with the Secretariat's comments and recommendations should provide all participants with the information and background that is necessary to have a fruitful discussion and to take the best decisions. It is highly unlikely that IUCN's, TRAFFIC's, or the Secretariat's recommendations were right in all cases, or – even if they are - will be followed in all cases, but that of course is not really possible or necessary. Nor is it the point, because after all it is the Parties that take the decisions.

In the last couple of months, I have had to vigorously reject claims that many Parties only base their opinion on a 'yes' or 'no' from the Secretariat. Such allegations are in my view unjustified and patronizing. Of course the Conference of the Parties deals with many issues that are of particular relevance to certain countries and continents, but I know that each and every delegation in this room realizes perfectly well that the issues being discussed are all interrelated and based on the same principles. A decision about an African species today is likely to be of relevance to the discussion about a South-American species tomorrow. One of the most positive developments in meetings of the Conference of the Parties I have seen over the years, is that the involvement of everybody in everything has increased and that, as a result, decisions are carried by a much larger number of Parties than in the past. I hope that process will continue to prevail at this meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen, our discussions on elephants, whales, sharks and sea-turtles are, I am sure, at times going to be difficult and heated, sometimes even emotional. The NGO-community will undoubtedly concentrate its efforts on these proposals and the media will give them most attention. This does not do sufficient justice to the many other important proposals we will have to decide upon in the coming weeks.

This meeting is not about elephants, it is *also* about elephants, it is not about whales, it is *also* about whales.

I therefore urge you to dedicate the attention they deserve to the other proposals as well.

Discussions will indeed sometimes be difficult, but I am convinced that – as in previous meetings of this Conference of the Parties – they will take place on the basis of mutual respect and in an atmosphere of friendship. You may have different opinions, or even totally reject the opinion of others, but no difference of opinion is justified if it has not been preceded by a frank two-way exchange of views between people that have carefully listened to and considered each others arguments. That, ladies and gentlemen, is exactly what this meeting is about, a platform for dialogue that leads to the best decisions for species conservation.

Let me assure you that I personally and all my colleagues in the CITES Secretariat – whom I owe a great deal of thanks for their tremendous accomplishments in the preparation of this meeting – will do everything possible to facilitate a successful outcome of this meeting.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.