

MINISTER EDNA MOLEWA, MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS (SOUTH AFRICA)

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HIGH-LEVEL THEMATIC DISCUSSION ON THE GLOBAL OBSERVANCE OF WORLD WILDLIFE DAY, 3 MARCH 2017

H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, President of UN General Assembly

H.E. Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Mr. John E. Scanlon, Secretary General of CITES

Panelists

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of President Jacob Zuma and the government of the Republic of South Africa I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for inviting us to address this august event; the commemoration of World Wildlife Day.

As I stand here today I also wish to convey the best wishes from the people of South Africa, especially our young people. I am pleased to say that over the years we have witnessed a greater involvement of the youth of South Africa in matters of conservation and wildlife protection.

From the 14-year-old schoolgirl who auctions paintings of rhino produced by her friends to raise funds for rhino conservation; to the founder of Miss Earth South Africa, who wants to harness the potential of young beauty pageant contestants as conservation ambassadors, to the young man from rural South Africa who regularly blogs on wildlife issues on the Youth Forum for People and Wildlife, our young people are now more than ever making their voices heard.

Excellencies,

The illicit trade in wild animals and plants presents a significant threat to biodiversity around the world.

The Global Outlook (GBO) presented by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) points to trend in species loss, with amphibians facing the greatest risk, and warm water reef-building corals showing the most rapid deterioration in status.

Amongst selected vertebrate, invertebrate and plant groups, between 12% and 55% of species are threatened with extinction.

The GBO further indicated that species of bird, mammal and amphibians that are exploited for food and medicines are also moving more quickly into a higher risk category, resulting in a threat to the health and well-being of millions of people directly dependent on the availability of wild species.

The report further noted that globally, some 80 per cent of people in developing countries rely on traditional medicines, the majority of which are derived from plants. I reflect on these statistics to highlight the role that conservation plays in safeguarding the future of humanity.

Safeguarding our precious natural capital for current and future generations means that we may be laying the groundwork today, but someday we will pass the baton onto them, the younger generation. It is the young people of today who will be the conservationists of tomorrow.

It was Franklin Delano Roosevelt who famously said: “We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

We cannot roll back history; we cannot turn back the sands of time. But we can actively work towards instilling in our youth a keen appreciation of and respect for the abundant fauna and flora that existed millions of years before humankind first walked the earth.

When we make young people partners in conservation, when we “listen to young voices”, as per the theme of this year’s World Wildlife Day, we are safeguarding this precious heritage.

The participation of the youth and local communities in the fight against wildlife crime forms an integral part of South Africa’s Integrated Strategic Management Approach to address rhino poaching.

This integrated approach that involves various government institutions working in unison with the private sector, local communities and civil society is bearing fruit, as such is evidenced by the latest comparative decline in rhino poached.

We will continue with our collaborative implementation of interventions to curb the illegal wildlife trade. The support of INTERPOL, the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), the Global

Environmental Facility (GEF), the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) and many, many others, are been invaluable in supporting collaboration.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2016 South Africa successfully hosted the 17th Conference of the Parties to CITES. It was here that a landmark resolution was adopted on youth engagement on matters of conservation. This resolution amongst other things encourages Parties to explore opportunities to engage today's youth in the work of CITES and around other wildlife conservation issues; as well as to create an educated and engaged youth networks that can inform and influence conservation decisions.

South Africa and the United States of America were co-proponents of the Resolution which was finally adopted by the COP. It is therefore extremely important on this World Wildlife Day that as we celebrate with specific focus on our Youth, we call on the entire world to become full participants in implementing that resolution, led by our young people.

As South Africa, we have already begun doing our bit. Our Youth Conservation Programme serves as an example of ways in which we must continue to integrate youth in conservation. In this regard, we have been implementing several programmes for young people since the dawn of our democratic dispensation.

Just to cite an example for the past 13 years, the Kids in Parks Programme has achieved notable strides, exposing more than 50 000 kids (from grade 5-11) who come from previously disadvantaged communities to National Parks.

This is a partnership initiative between the Department of Environmental Affairs, Department of Basic Education, South African National Parks and a private sector partner.

Through this programme, young people get an opportunity to experience life in the protected areas, (some for the first time) and further get opportunities to learn practically about natural and cultural heritage resources in these protected areas.

Many other educational programmes are in place such as the South African National Parks Junior Ranger Programme, Kudu Green School Initiative, KwaZulu Natal's S'fundimvelo Environmental Education Programme, the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area's Children in the Wilderness Initiative and others.

Through our National Development Plan - 2030, South Africa promotes the adoption of a "youth lens" in our approaches to build a future for South Africa's youth as well as applying interventions to promote conservation and the fight against illegal wildlife trade.

South Africa has identified the biodiversity sector as a catalyst for economic growth and transformation, as well as for meeting our country's developmental needs.

In this regard we will be accelerating entrepreneurship amongst the youth.

Events such as this one ensure that the challenges relating to illegal wildlife trade are profiled on the global stage, thus ensuring the timely implementation of the various resolutions relating to wildlife management.

We encourage all Parties to ensure the implementation of the decisions from these conventions.

Such implementation needs to be done within the context of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Goal 15, in particular 15.7, calls for 'nations to take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products.

In addition, Target 15.c of the SDGs, calls for the 'enhancement of global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities'.

I would like to express my appreciation to the CITES Secretariat for implementing the "Through Young Eyes" photo competition, the winners of which will be announced today. We congratulate all the young people from around the globe who submitted entries; they represent the true breadth of talent we enjoy.

Our continued engagement with our young people through such initiatives, will ensure that the future of conservation is guaranteed.

As the Secretary-General of CITES Mr. John Scanlon has said: if we are to succeed “we must fully harness the innovation and energy of youth, and combine it with the wisdom that comes with experience, if we are to make the change we need to happen.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, in conclusion,

Each and every one of us here today should be proud that the world indeed has young people who have taken it upon themselves to step into the conservation space.

They do not labour under the false assumption that conserving our natural heritage is somebody else’s responsibility.

Together with the youth, we can secure our wildlife, now and into the future.

I thank you