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MEDIA RELEASE

Moratorium on Legal Trade

Johannesburg, 24 September 2016 - As the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP17) gets under way in Johannesburg, the issue of trade as it relates to the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and the white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) is once again on the agenda. While anti-trade lobbying has been at an all-time high, it should be borne in mind that the current crisis with regard to declining rhino and elephant numbers is due to CITES's adoption of a strategy that has failed to work – namely, a moratorium on legal trade.

This trade ban, in place since 1977 in the case of rhinos and since 1989 in the case of elephants, has only served to fuel poaching – the IUCN's African Elephant Status Report, launched at CoP17, confirms that Africa's overall elephant population has seen the worst decline in 25 years, largely due to poaching over the past 10 years. Similarly, the white rhino population has suffered severe decline, with over 100,000 rhino poached.

Eugene Lapointe, founder of IWMC World Conservation Trust and former Secretary General of CITES from 1982-1990, says that CITES should urgently consider lifting the trade moratorium in view of the fact that the intended results have not been achieved.

"It is time to accept that prohibition has not worked," he said at CoP17. "Outlawing legal trade has meant that only outlaws themselves are trading. It is clear that a well-managed, controlled trade would be a tool with which African range states could conserve their dwindling elephant and rhino populations."

Lapointe says that history has shown that prohibition does not work, whether it relates to alcohol, drugs, ivory or rhino horn. Further, demonising poachers creates a false dichotomy whereby people are viewed as enemies of wildlife. "We are recreating the inquisition. By saying people are the enemy we are finding witches to burn at the stake, instead of looking for sustainable solutions that benefit both people and animals. Communities living adjacent to areas with rhino and elephant should be allowed to legally benefit from the sustainable use of these resources. People must be part of the solution to the poaching problem," he says.

"We want CITES to lift the trade moratorium and change its philosophy so we can conserve species, not for the sake of species themselves, but for the sake of humankind."

— ENDS —

Working for you with over 70 years of experience in the CITES Secretariat

The International Wildlife Management Consortium (IWMC) World Conservation Trust is an international organization that promotes Sustainable Use as a conservation mechanism, for the protection of the sovereign rights of independent nations and for the respect of diverse cultures and traditions.

Eugene Lapointe, President of IWMC World Conservation Trust was Secretary General of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) from 1982 to 1990.

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