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MEDIA RELEASE

CITES and the Livelihoods of Rural Communities

Johannesburg, 28 September 2016 - The issue of the livelihoods of rural communities is high on the agenda of the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP17) in Johannesburg - and discussions around the documents submitted on livelihoods and food security, the establishment of the rural communities committee and trophy hunting will be of paramount importance to African member states in particular.

On the eve of such discussions, it is critical that governments adopt the resolution set out in the document on livelihoods and food security, submitted by, *inter alia*, Côte d'Ivoire and Namibia. This document prioritises the sustainable use of resources by communities, namely the legal trade of elephant ivory and rhino horn – a strategy that can go a long way towards eliminating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition and ending rural poverty (two of the five strategic objectives of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations). The matter is particularly urgent as CITES moves to list a greater number of species commercially exploited for food.

Eugene Lapointe, founder of IWMC World Conservation Trust and former Secretary General of CITES from 1982-1990, says that while eliminating trade may seem to be a step in the right direction – that is, protecting the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and the white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) – the reality is that poor communities have no incentive to conserve these species if they perceive them to be more valuable dead than alive.

"If the option to legally trade resources is taken off the table, there is a real possibility that a potential source of income will be taken away from rural communities in African countries," he said at CoP17. "I am sure that governments – and CITES – would not want to be responsible for removing a potential source of food. However, if communities are not permitted to manage the resources at their disposal, this is precisely what will occur. With 870 million people in the world designated as hungry – many of whom are located in Africa – it is vital that we find sustainable ways to provide livelihoods for those trapped by poverty."

Lapointe says that a far-sighted approach to the benefits of legal trade can create the conservationists of tomorrow: "Rural communities that can make use of their resources will be incentivised to conserve those resources for the benefit of future generations, and they will also, as a consequence, have no need to engage in illegal and unsustainable trade."

— ENDS —

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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