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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Limits to Voting Rights at CITES Threaten Species Survival

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*Bangkok 28 February 2013* As the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) gathers for its most important Conference of the Parties (COP) in decades, the world's leading advocate for the sustainable use of wildlife is warning delegates that they must maintain voting rights for small and developing nations if the organization as a whole is to succeed in aiding wildlife conservation.

IWMC World Conservation Trust, which is led by former CITES Secretary General Eugene Lapointe, warned that the voting rights of small and developing nations is under threat from moves to limit the use of the secret ballot at COP meetings. The secret ballot exists to ensure that small and developing nations cannot be politically intimidated or bullied by developed nations or outside entities that want them to vote in a particular way on listing proposals. When ballots can be cast in secret, small nations can vote according to their sovereign interests without fear of consumer boycotts, trade threats or other retaliatory actions.

Animal rights groups have been lobbying to severely curtail the use of secret ballots by changing the Rule of Procedure at CITES. Worries that they might succeed were heightened recently when the CITES Secretariat recommended that a simple majority of voting nations could force through the change. Until now, CITES has operated under Rules and Procedures agreed by consensus, while substantive decisions have required the support of a two-thirds majority of nations present and voting.

Small and developing nations also fear that a vote will take place before some of them have even arrived at the two-week COP meeting in Thailand. Voting on proposals from the European Union and Chile/ Mexico are currently scheduled to take place directly after the CITES meeting opens on Sunday 3 March. The arrival of delegates from small and developing nations is more commonly delayed by travel and visa issues.

Eugene Lapointe said: "This CITES meeting could get off to a terrible start if voting protections are stripped away on Day One. If mankind is to succeed in conserving endangered species globally we need a framework of cooperation, not hostility. Protecting voting rights is essential for protecting species in the long run."

Mr. Lapointe added: "If CITES limits voting rights, it will be adopting a colonial approach. All its key decisions will effectively be dictated by the developed world. This will result in

inappropriate, inefficient and unenforceable listings of species, a loss of sovereign rights in the third world and an economic catastrophe for people who depend on wild resources for their subsistence. Ultimately, it will undermine the very survival of endangered species.”

IWMC believes that CITES should mirror the rules of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which allow a secret ballot if a Party requests one. Animal rights lobbyists defend limits on the use of secret ballots as a means to ensure ‘transparency’, although they stepped up their lobbying at CITES after rumors circulated at COP 15 that some European Union nations voted against the EU’s mandated lines.

IWMC believes that transparency is a national issue, with delegates answerable first to their own citizens for how they vote on CITES listing proposals, not to other CITES nations or animal rights groups. Nations also have the ability to announce how they cast their vote even when a secret ballot is used.

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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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