



Control of Trade in African Elephant Ivory (SC53 Doc. 20.1)

53RD MEETING OF THE CITES STANDING COMMITTEE
27TH JUNE – 1ST JULY 2005
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Background

An action plan for the control of trade in African elephant ivory was adopted by the Parties at CoP13. This action plan requires all African elephant range States to take urgent action with regard to unregulated domestic ivory markets and the control of illegal trade in ivory across international borders.

Parties at CoP13 also approved limited non-commercial trade in ivory *ekipas* (traditionally carved ivory ornaments) from Namibia after considerable debate and alteration of the original Namibian proposal.

Control of Trade in African Elephant Ivory

The Secretariat observes in SC53 Doc. 20.1, paragraph 14, that they do not believe there is a requirement for the Standing Committee to make any decisions in relation to the trade in African elephant ivory at this meeting. The Species Survival Network (SSN) urges the Standing Committee to consider the following points with regard to the action plan and the trade in ivory *ekipas*.

Action Plan

The action plan directs Parties to submit progress reports to the Secretariat for consideration at Standing Committee. SC53 Doc. 20.1, paragraph 3, notes that the Secretariat has received progress reports from seven African elephant range States (there are 37 range States). SSN encourages the Standing Committee to discuss the possible reasons for such a poor response, and how submissions can be encouraged, given the importance of full co-operation from all relevant Parties if the action plan is to be effective. SSN urges the Standing Committee request the Secretariat to provide progress reports received to the members of the Standing Committee, if they have not already done so, in order that all aspects of the reports may be fully considered.

Additionally, SSN encourages the Standing Committee to establish a new (and final) deadline for the submission of progress reports. SSN further encourages the Standing Committee to establish a deadline for implementation of the action plan.

Further to the Secretariat's particular mention of Ethiopia's progress in tackling illegal ivory trade (SC53 Doc. 20.1, paragraph 4), SSN also congratulates the Ethiopian authorities for their outstanding achievements. SSN member organizations have been involved in capacity building projects with the Ethiopian wildlife authorities. The Standing Committee should urge other countries to follow Ethiopia's lead, which would surely result in a palpable impact on domestic and international illegal trade in ivory.

Verification Work

SSN encourages the Standing Committee to proceed with caution regarding any consideration of China as an approved importing country for African ivory. As the Secretariat acknowledges in SC53 Doc. 20.1, paragraph 11, China continues to be a destination for illegally acquired ivory. Indeed,

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*CITES is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora



only last month, China reported that several pieces of ivory of Ugandan origin were seized by Tianjin customs authorities.

With regard to future verification missions, SSN appreciates the stated intention of the Secretariat to make use of information from a range of sources when carrying out verification missions, and looks forward to being in contact with the Secretariat in this regard.

Trade in *Ekipas*

At CoP13, Namibia was authorized to sell ivory *ekipas* for non-commercial purposes under certain conditions. The approved annotation for Namibia reads as follows: “*trade in individually marked and certified ekipas incorporated in finished jewellery for non-commercial purposes for Namibia*”.

SSN has the following concerns about this annotation:

- No definition of *ekipas* accompanies the annotation. *Ekipas* are not a widely known or recognised wildlife product outside southern Africa. The absence of a definition could therefore cause some considerable confusion for customs officials.
- No limitation with regard to the size and weight of ivory per item was identified at CoP13. Such an oversight could lead to larger quantities of ivory being exported from Namibia than was envisioned by the CITES Parties.
- No limitation was identified with regard to the total amount or weight of ivory *ekipas* that could be exported from Namibia. Parties endorsed this annotation in the belief that only small numbers of *ekipas* would be exported. SSN hopes that the amount of ivory being exported from Namibia is being closely monitored by the wildlife authorities there.
- There has been no official description of how *ekipas* are to be individually marked or certified.
- No explanation of the term ‘non-commercial purposes’ with regard to the export of *ekipas* from Namibia has been provided. Therefore there appears to be no official limit to the quantity of *ekipas* that can be exported for non-commercial purposes by people leaving Namibia.

Although SSN urges the Standing Committee to address all of the above points in order to retain some degree of regulation and monitoring over this type of export, the most serious omission, which in our opinion must be rectified by Standing Committee as a matter of urgency, is the final point regarding non-commercial purposes. In order to retain some level of control over the non-commercial aspect of this trade, there must be a threshold placed upon individuals who wish to buy and export ivory *ekipas* for non-commercial purposes.

Indeed, SSN believes that the issue of thresholds for trade for non-commercial purposes within CITES as a whole is an area which should be addressed more generally, otherwise it remains open to misinterpretation and misuse. In cases such as the ivory *ekipas*, SSN strongly urges the Standing Committee to take the precautionary approach to the export of *ekipas* and move to address some or all of the issues mentioned above.