

CITES and the Ivory Trade

This fact sheet summarizes the major milestones in governments' attempts to secure the future of the African elephant, which today is under serious threat from poaching and the ivory trade.

Background

1. In 1979 there were an estimated 1.3 million African elephants. Today, only 470,000 remain; some authorities estimate the number to be considerably lower.
2. The loss of a million elephants has been due primarily to killing for ivory. Natural habitat loss is a second important factor: human population has tripled in elephant range states since 1970.
3. Major public awareness campaigns have been launched worldwide to save the elephant and halt the illegal trade in ivory.
4. In October 1989, at the seventh meeting of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Convention of the Parties (CoP7), governments banned international trade in ivory with effect from January 1990.
5. The links between the ivory trade and the illegal killing of elephants are clear (see KEF Fact Sheet 02, *Elephant Poaching and the Ivory Trade*). Unless action is taken based on good information and sound policy, elephants will be gone from much of Africa in our lifetimes.

The International Mechanism

6. CITES is an international treaty ratified by 175 countries or Parties. The aim of the treaty is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild fauna and flora does not threaten the survival of the species.
7. CITES works through a licensing system by which international trade in specimens of selected species of wild fauna or flora is authorized. The species covered by CITES are listed under three Appendices. Listing is determined by the degree of protection a species requires. Appendix I affords the highest level of protection. It is accorded to species threatened with extinction and it bans their commercial trade. Appendix II and Appendix III species are not necessarily threatened with extinction, but international trade in them needs to be controlled to ensure their survival.
8. Parties to CITES meet every two to three years at the Conference of Parties (CoP) to review the implementation of the convention. The last meeting was CoP14 held in the Hague, 3-15 June 2007. The next meeting will be held in Doha, Qatar, 13-25 March 2010.
9. Elephant issues have formed an important part of the discussion at CITES since the 1980s when intense poaching across Africa led to the near extinction of the elephant in parts of the continent and its subsequent listing in Appendix I at CoP7 in 1989 (see KEF Fact Sheet 02, *Elephant Poaching and the Ivory Trade*).
10. Since 1989 when the Parties to CITES CoP7 listed the African elephant in Appendix I, there have been proposals to transfer some elephant populations to Appendix II and to allow international trade in ivory:
 - 1992 (CoP8), Botswana, Malawi, Namibia and Zimbabwe presented a joint proposal to transfer their elephant populations from Appendix I to II. This proposal was withdrawn after discussions.
 - 1994 (CoP9), Sudan and South Africa proposals to transfer their populations to Appendix II were withdrawn.

- 1997 (CoP10), Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe elephant populations were downlisted from Appendix I to II. They were allowed to sell raw ivory stocks to Japan.
- 2000 (CoP11), The South Africa elephant population was downlisted from Appendix I to II. Proposals from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe to allow further trade in ivory were withdrawn.
- 2002 (CoP12), Namibia, Botswana and South Africa were allowed to trade 60 metric tonnes of ivory, subject to conditions to be verified. A proposal for an annual quota for export of raw ivory from Namibia was withdrawn. A proposal from Zambia to downlist its elephant population and proposals for sales of raw ivory from Zambia and Zimbabwe were rejected.
- 2004 (CoP13) Namibia and South Africa presented trade proposals. Namibia was allowed trade in *ekipas* (traditional amulets) incorporated in finished jewellery for non-commercial purposes and trade in elephant leather and hair goods for commercial purposes. The South African proposal for commercial trade in leather and hair goods was adopted.
- 2007 (CoP14) a nine-year moratorium on trade by current Appendix II countries was approved, intending to provide a 'resting period' during which no further ivory trade proposals would be presented for consideration by the CoP. A one-off sale of 108 tonnes of ivory from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe was approved, including the 60 tonnes approved at CoP12 and expanded to all government owned stocks registered by 31st January, 2007.
- 2010 (CoP15) Tanzania and Zimbabwe have submitted downlisting proposals. They are asking for their elephant populations currently listed in Appendix I to be listed in Appendix II. They want to be allowed to sell approximately 120 tonnes of ivory between them and to be allowed commercial trade in live animals and a range of specimens (see KEF Fact Sheet 04 *Proposals on the African Elephant for CITES CoP15*).

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Kenya Elephant Forum

Ms. Pat Awori
PO Box 47756
Nairobi 00100, Kenya
aworipat@yahoo.com

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