



**Remarks by**

**H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe**  
**President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations**  
**General Assembly**

**World Wildlife Day**

**Geneva**  
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*Please check against delivery*

H.E. Mr. Didier Burkhalter, President of the Swiss Confederation,  
H.E. Minister Hugo Swire,  
H.E. Ambassador Thani Thongphakdi,  
Excellencies,  
Secretary-General,  
Mr. John E. Scanlon, Secretary-General of CITES,  
Ms. Ruth Hahn-Weinert,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be able to join you here in Geneva today to celebrate the very first World Wildlife Day, which is a tribute to our natural and cultural heritage. At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for bringing us together on this special occasion. I also extend my appreciation to UNEP, the Good Planet Foundation and the Permanent Missions of Switzerland, Thailand and the Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who have helped organize this exhibition.

In recognition of the numerous contributions of wildlife to sustainable development and human well-being, the General Assembly last year proclaimed 3 March as World Wildlife Day, which is also the same date that the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was adopted in 1973.

And indeed, the world's wild fauna and flora ought to be celebrated for they bring so much to our human family. The exhibition we open today illustrates how animals, insects, plants and trees are all unique pieces forming the beautiful mosaic of our natural environment. Not only do they sustain our livelihoods, they are an integral part of our cultural heritage through tales and legends, symbols and traditions. In the complex symphony of nature, each and every species plays an essential part to maintain the delicate balance of our planet's ecosystems.

Yet these many gifts are increasingly under threat as unsustainable production and consumption patterns put this irreplaceable natural heritage under enormous strain. Poaching and illegal wildlife trade add to these pressures and constitute serious offenses often linked to corruption and organized crime. Every day an estimated 150 to 200 species of plants, insects

and animals become extinct. These losses not only affect our ecosystems, they also threaten our health, our food supplies and our economies.

On this first World Wildlife Day, I call on Member States to renew their commitment to the protection and conservation of biodiversity and to actively combat illegal wildlife trade. As we now begin shaping the contours of a new sustainable development agenda for the post-2015 era, we have an historic opportunity to let our actions reflect fully this commitment. Let us use this momentum to restore a harmonious and balanced relationship between human beings and the many life forms that share our planet with us.

Thank you.

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