

4 March 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Commemoration of World Wildlife Day**

**Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

General Assembly resolution 68/205 proclaimed March 3rd of each year as World Wildlife Day in recognition of the intrinsic value of wildlife and its contributions to the various dimensions of sustainable development and human well-being.

Around the world, communities are dependent on wildlife; whether for sustenance, economic activities, or cultural identity. The illegal trafficking of this natural capital affects the resource base of local communities and indeed, of entire nations, undermining human welfare, legitimate business and government institutions. It also compromises efforts towards sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The statistics on the trafficking of wildlife are worrisome. In Africa, for instance, about 20,000 elephants were slaughtered and over 10,000 pangolins were illegally trafficked in 2013 alone.

Estimates indicate that illegal wildlife trade is worth billions of dollars, with organised criminal networks, and even rebel and terrorist groups taking part in the illicit trafficking of wildlife.

There is growing recognition worldwide that trafficking in wildlife poses a serious security risk, in addition to environmental and economic concerns.

Excellencies,

At the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, Heads of State and Government recognized the economic, social and environmental impacts of illicit trafficking in wildlife. Furthermore, in the first session of the United Nations Environmental Assembly, Member States adopted a resolution focused on illegal trade in wildlife. The resolution emphasized the need to implement existing commitments and enhance international coordination to combat the illegal trade in wildlife.

Most recently, the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals also underscored the need to combat illicit wildlife trade, in the context of the protection of biodiversity.

Globally, a lot has been done through multilateral agreements, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and initiatives like the International Consortium to Combat Wildlife Crime.

We need to strengthen our commitment and enhance cooperation among Member States, the United Nations system, NGOs and civil society to curb wildlife crime.

Distinguished Participants,

A coordinated international response is imperative; aimed at both the supply and demand side of poaching and the illegal trade in wildlife. We should do more to promote adequate national legislation, improve intelligence sharing and border controls, strengthen global, regional and national enforcement, improve capabilities to combat poaching and illegal trafficking, among other initiatives. Local communities must also be encouraged to take a vested interest in protecting wildlife resources.

As we gather this morning, I am heartened to see the international community is increasingly being mobilized to combat this scourge.

Raising public awareness about the disastrous implications wildlife crime has on sustainable development, as well as on biodiversity and species, is critical in our efforts to promote wildlife preservation. Let us use this commemorative meeting to reflect on how we can effectively combat illegal wildlife trade in all its forms.

I thank you for your attention.