



The African Elephant CoP18 – CITES held account



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The Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) regulates international trade in species of fauna and flora threatened with extinction. Every three years, the Conference of the Parties (CoP), which brings together all the member States of CITES, meets to make decisions about trade. The representatives of the member States determine which species qualify for better protection, and which species can be traded freely.

Elephant: CITES must be sustainable

The eighteenth Conference of the Parties (CoP18) was scheduled to take place in Sri Lanka, in May–June of this year. Unfortunately, the tragic Easter bombings in Colombo in April prompted the organisers to postpone the Conference. It will now be held in Geneva from 16 to 28 August 2019.

One of the most controversial species, which is the subject of much debate in CITES, is the emblematic African elephant. The threats to the survival of the African elephant are as serious as they are variable: loss of habitat – which inevitably leads to conflict with human beings –, droughts, poaching, and the capture of elephants for overseas zoos – there is no respite for African elephants. The demand for ivory, particularly in the Asian markets, is so high that the price per kilogram has risen to astronomical levels.

CITES again and again deliberates in how best to regulate the trade in elephants – above all, the ivory trade. There are two opposing sides: those who are in favour of trade, and who want to allow the free trade of ivory

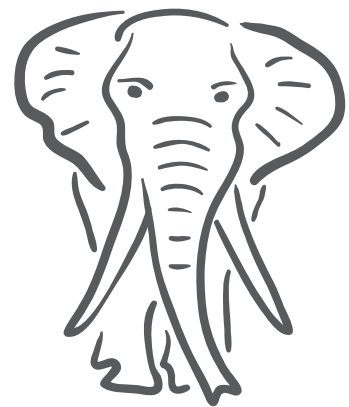
on an international and national level; and conservationists, who believe that the only way to protect them is to completely prohibit – unreservedly and without compromise – any trade in elephants and elephant products.

Currently, the African elephant does not have a clear status under CITES regulations. Most elephant populations in Africa are listed in Appendix I of CITES, which prohibits any commercial trade in ivory. However, the populations of four countries are listed in Appendix II of CITES, namely those in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. The differential listing of elephants creates an ambiguity and loopholes that are exploited by ivory traffickers.

The only period in recent history when the elephant populations in Africa were able to recover and were safe from poaching, followed after the seventh CoP in 1989. This took place in Lausanne during which all the elephant populations in Africa were listed on Appendix I of CITES. Since then, the above-mentioned populations of the four countries have been downgraded

to Appendix II, and the situation has gone from bad to worse.

However, opposition is growing. An alliance of more than thirty African states called the African Elephant Coalition (AEC), has been fighting for more than ten years to improve the international protection of elephants. This year, the AEC will put forward four proposals at the CoP18.



HANDS OFF IVORY!



THE AEC'S PROPOSALS TO CITES-COP18 FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL ELEPHANTS:

1. List all African elephants on Appendix I of CITES. The AEC believes that the species has to be reviewed as a whole and protected in a non-differential way. Indeed, elephants are highly migratory, and it is thus not possible, according to specialist biologists, to define national elephant populations. As a result, differential listing makes absolutely no sense.

2. Closure of all domestic ivory markets. In principle, CITES only regulates international trade. However, even though certain key domestic markets have recently been closed, such as in the US and China, other markets, including the EU and Japan, continue to authorise certain forms of ivory trade. These domestic markets make it all too often possible to launder poached ivory. For example, through the falsification of documents and staining ivory to make it look older. These markets therefore urgently need to be closed.

3. Adoption of clear and legally binding guidelines on the trade of live elephants. Many baby elephants are taken from their families, particularly in Zimbabwe, and are sent to zoos around the world. In fact,

CITES does not consider the trade in animals for zoos as <commercial>. The regulations are therefore weak and relatively vague. Many of these zoos and other places of captivity do not have the facilities to take care of the wild-caught animals in an adequate manner. Furthermore, elephants are highly intelligent and sociable animals whose needs are not restricted to a certain number of square metres and adequate forage. Thus, only in situ conservation centres, that is to say, centres in the natural habitat can realistically be considered suitable.

4. Better management of ivory stocks. Illegally obtained ivory from poaching is seized by the authorities in each country. The ivory is then placed in storage. The resulting ivory stocks have been growing from year to year and are beginning to pose security problems for these countries as the ivory stocks are often pillaged. The stolen ivory is then laundered in domestic ivory markets or is smuggled internationally. It is imperative then that CITES issues clear guidelines on the management of these national ivory stocks. The countries concerned must produce regular reports on their stocks so that any possible shortcomings and losses of ivory can be identified.

Fondation Franz Weber (FFW) has actively supported the AEC since its creation. The organisation backs the Coalition's proposals put forward at the CoP18. As an official observer, FFW will be present in Geneva to monitor the proceedings and provide the AEC with the support it may require in putting their proposals forward.

CITES is far from being an ideal convention. However, it has set up a control and licensing system that effectively regulates the international trade in species. This is why FFW operates within the framework of this system to influence the outcome of the debate. This year, more than ever before and especially in view of the mass extinction of species and environmental

catastrophes, countries urgently need to assume their responsibilities and act in the best interests of the species, rather than trade. Almost exactly thirty years ago, the seventh CoP in Lausanne decided to give African elephants complete protection. Fondation Franz Weber will be doing everything in our power to ensure that history will repeat itself.

