

World governments urge end to domestic ivory markets

September 11 2016, by Kerry Sheridan



After fierce debate, including opposition from Namibia and Japan, a motion was adopted at the IUCN World Conservation Congress to urge closure of all domestic ivory markets

In a bid to stop the killing of elephants for their tusks, world governments voted at a major conservation conference to urge the closure of all domestic ivory markets.

After fierce debate—including opposition from governments like Namibia and Japan—the motion was adopted on the final day of the International Union for Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress, a 10-day meeting that drew 9,000 people to Honolulu, Hawaii this month.

"Today's vote by IUCN members is the first time that a major international body has called on every country in the world to close its legal markets for elephant ivory," said Andrew Wetzler, deputy chief program officer at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"It's truly a landmark moment, and a victory for elephants that will hopefully be repeated later this month at the next meeting of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Johannesburg."

Although the motion is non-binding, it "urges the governments of countries with domestic ivory markets to take all necessary legislative and regulatory efforts to close them," according to the IUCN.

Experts say that domestic ivory markets help fuel poaching by allowing traffickers a cover for their illegal imports and exports.



Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) rangers prepare a pyre in preparation for a burning of tonnes of ivory, rhino-horn and other confiscated wildlife trophies

The United States and China, among the biggest consumers of ivory, have already agreed to enact near-total bans on their domestic markets.

At the IUCN meeting, Japan and Namibia—which also have thriving domestic ivory markets—sought to soften the language of the motion by making 20 different amendments, but those efforts were rejected.

"The global conservation community is stepping up," said Wildlife Conservation Society President and CEO Cristian Samper.

"No more domestic ivory sales. Elephants have had enough of the [ivory trade](#) and so has the world."

Poaching persists

CITES banned the international commercial trade in African elephant ivory in 1989.



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But illegal poaching of endangered elephants for their tusks persists at dangerous levels, according to research released at the start of the September 1-10 conference, the largest of its kind in the conservation community.

Savanna elephants have declined at a rate of 27,000—or eight

percent—per year, with a total of 144,000 lost in less than a decade, said the findings.

Poaching hotspots identified include Angola, Mozambique and Tanzania, where "staggering population declines" were found, said the study funded by Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist Paul Allen.

Other populations face "local extinction" in northeast Democratic Republic of Congo, northern Cameroon and southwest Zambia.

Wildlife groups hailed the IUCN move and called for more action at the CITES talks in Johannesburg later this month.

"There, we remain hopeful the delegates will be emboldened by the IUCN vote to adopt a resolution submitted by African governments that also calls for closure of domestic ivory markets," said Samper.

"The shutting down of domestic ivory markets will send a clear signal to traffickers and organized criminal syndicates that ivory is worthless and will no longer support their criminal activities causing security problems in local communities and wiping out wildlife."

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