

# Vote Conservation. Not Commercialisation.

I write to you as my public representative within the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Your vote at the next Conference of Parties is critical. I urge you to demonstrate leadership and commitment to the long term conservation of our remaining rhino species and vote against Eswatini's proposal to remove the existing annotation relating to the country's white rhinos which would allow regulated legal trade in rhinoceros horns and derivatives.

Global efforts to disarm criminal gangs, stigmatise horn consumption and shut down passages which provide access to launder horns requires effort from all sectors of society, in particular the CITES authority, a critical stakeholder in providing a sustainable future for wildlife.

Rhino horns are used for medicinal, status symbol and practical purposes, but also traded as investment pieces as speculative buyers acquire newly sourced horns (from poached rhinos) as long-term investments, banking on rarity and/or extinction to increase financial return. Sales of historical artefacts also perpetuates demand by providing a financial value which sustains the market.

*"Global trade of rhino horns is touted as a viable solution to the poaching crisis by a cluster of African nations, yet no horn consumptive country has publicly supported their efforts to overturn international prohibition"*

A vote in support of regulated trade would be an inexcusable impediment to demand reduction and elimination campaigns and would further legitimise, popularise and normalise the use of products sourced from endangered species.

It is morally indefensible to allow any nation to commercially benefit under the guise of conservation from the sale of medically fallacious and ethically unacceptable products and derivatives from body parts of endangered species by exploiting public naivety, misplaced beliefs and misguided perceptions.



*"It's hypocritical of parties to claim to support demand reduction campaigns while also supporting motions to overturn the international ban"*

Any trade (limited or unrestricted) would likely increase demand exponentially. Horns and other rhinoceros derivatives would become accessible to consumers previously excluded due to high black market prices or illegality of transaction. Previous consumptive countries could also reemerge prompting intensive animal husbandry to increase reproductive performance to meet demand and maximise profits.

I respectfully remind you wildlife commodification and industrialisation is largely considered institutionalised cruelty which has no conservation value or benefit beyond economic incentives. Intensively farming rhinos and international legalised trade in rhino horn and other derivatives would lead to extinction of rhinos in the wild where they rightfully belong.

A common argument claiming regular horn harvesting is sustainable is conjecture. Horns are considered a renewable, sustainable resource only because they naturally regrow after partial removal (de-horning). There are no academic studies to ascertain the long term physical or psychological effects of either regular chemical anaesthesia or horn removal. Without such studies it would be incautious to support such a procedure.

Claims by Eswatini that CITES prohibition has failed to prevent poaching and reduce demand for rhinoceros horns is a common and deliberate misrepresentation of the party's mandate. The statement is intended to deflect responsibility away from signatories who have failed to either fulfil their obligations under the convention and/or consider compliance restrictive and a burden.

Trans-national criminal gangs are resilient, versatile and quick to adapt their methods of concealment. In a report published in September 2017 by TRAFFIC in excess of five tonnes of rhino horns originating from Africa were seized internationally between January 2010 and June 2017. This is evidence current provisions to prevent cross border smuggling are grossly inadequate. It is fair to assume many more tonnes are also leaving Africa undetected. For this reason it would be erroneous to believe regulated trade, no matter how strict would be workable since traffickers ignore regulations and use bribery to persuade authorities to turn a blind eye.

As actions around the world are increasingly focused on closing down domestic markets in trade of body parts of endangered species, I urge you to use the forthcoming Conference of Parties as a catalyst to uphold your international obligations. Please ensure prohibition is upheld not only to prevent the impending extinction of wild rhinos, but instil integrity within the convention.