



Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN, Geneva

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Sri Lanka expresses its renewed commitment to protect endangered wildlife species

Renewing its commitment under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Sri Lanka announced that it will destroy 359 pieces of blood ivory, equalling 1.5 tonnes on 26th January 2016 at the Gall Face Green, Colombo.

Minister Gamini Jayawickrama Perera, Minister of Sustainable Development and Wildlife, made this announcement at the 66th Standing Committee meeting of CITES held in Geneva from 11th to 15th January 2016. In 2012, Sri Lanka Customs forfeited a blood ivory shipment, with a total of 359 pieces of ivory. Addressing Member States and the civil society representatives, Minister Jayawickrama Perera said that *“this event will highlight to the world, and to everybody within our country, that we will not tolerate any illegal trade of ivory”*. The ivory stock will be publicly destroyed, with religious offerings to mark the unnecessary sacrifice of those elephants. Mr. John E. Scanlon, the Secretary – General of the CITES is also scheduled to visit Sri Lanka from 26th to 28th January 2016 to participate in this event. During his visit, Mr. Scanlon will meet with the President, Prime Minister and other key officials to discuss further cooperation under the Convention.

During the 66th Standing Committee meeting, Sri Lanka also announced its proposal for listing of three thresher shark species (Sinhala name : *“Kassa Mora”*) under the CITES Appendix II, which will be considered for decision at the CoP17 meeting in September 2016 to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Sri Lanka co-hosted a side – event on the 14th January 2016 alongside the Maldives, who have also submitted a proposal to list silky sharks under the same convention to highlight the importance of listing of these shark species. Mr. John E. Scanlon the Secretary-General of the Convention, inaugurating the event, highlighted the successes of the previous shark listings at CoP16. Addressing the event, Minister Jayawickrama Perera said that *“With 100 million sharks killed each year, strong action is clearly needed to protect them wherever they are found, and the Government of Sri Lanka is joining the global battle to save sharks and rays found at home in the Indian Ocean, and all around the world”*.

He further added that *“Over the past two years, we have hosted both regional and national workshops on CITES shark and ray implementation in Sri Lanka. We brought together countries from all over Southern Asia and have*

demonstrated just how effective CITES listings are in protecting sharks and rays and how much more needs to be done". Minister Jayawickrama Perera urged other countries to work together with Sri Lanka on the proposal made and improve sustainable trade for these species.

Delegates from member states and civil society representatives who attended the side- event expressed notable interest on the proposal. Among the panellists were Mr. Abdulla Mohamed Didi, Deputy Minister of Environment and Energy of Maldives, a technical presentation on the thresher shark proposal by Mr. Daniel Fernando (advisor to Minister of Sustainable Development and Wildlife, Sri Lanka), and a presentation on the efficiency at which these proposals can be implemented by Ms. Debra Abercrombie (Abercrombie & Fish, USA).

Thresher sharks are considered to be facing global population declines ranging from 63% up to 99%, depending on the region. These declines have also been documented in Sri Lanka, which resulted in a national ban on the fishery of these species in 2012 (published in Gazette No. 1768/36). A CITES listing of these species will ensure that any international trade of these species will be sustainable, while simultaneously helping implement and enforce the domestic prohibition.

In addition to a number of bilateral consultation had with CITES member countries in seeking support for Sri Lanka's proposal on listing of these shark species, as well as to explore avenues of future bilateral cooperation in conservation of wildlife species in Sri Lanka, Minister Jayawickrama Perera also met with Mr. John E. Scanlon, the Secretary – General of the CITES to explore future cooperation under the Convention. The Secretary – General appreciated the steps taken by Sri Lanka under the Convention, and noted in particular the ivory destruction event which he is scheduled to attend. Minister Jayawickrama Perera was accompanied by Ravinatha P. Aryasinha, Permanent Representative/ Ambassador and Mrs. M.L.F. Mafusa, Second Secretary from the Permanent Mission in Geneva, and Mr. Daniel Fernando, advisor to Minister.

Since its ratification of the CITES Convention in 1979, this is the first time Sri Lanka has been represented at Ministerial level at the meetings of this important global convention, which is one of the largest environmental agreements regulating the international trade in wildlife. Currently, CITES regulates more than 5,600 species of animals and 30,000 species of plants, against over-exploitation through international trade and has 181 member states as of 2015. Mr. Shashika Sedara Hettige has been appointed as a member of the CITES Convention Secretariat, the first Sri Lankan to be appointed since its inception in 1975.

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