

UNITED NATIONS



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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT GENERAL ASSEMBLY EVENT ON WORLD
WILDLIFE DAY**

AS DELIVERED

New York, 3 March 2017

**Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**I am pleased to be with you for this fourth observance of
United Nations World Wildlife Day.**

**The focus this year is to engage young people to protect the
world's wild animals and plants.**

**Over the past four decades, the planet has lost as much as
50 per cent of its wild animals and plants – and, in some areas,
even more – due to climate change, habitat loss, over-
exploitation, poaching and illicit trafficking.**

**The illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products, including
elephant ivory, high value timber and marine species, is a threat
not only to sustainable development but to peace and security.**

**This sophisticated transnational crime is facilitated by
corruption and weak governance, and managed by some of the
world's most ruthless organized crime networks --including
violent extremists and non-State armed groups.**

In response, United Nations Member States have signalled their political determination to end these destructive crimes.

Sustainable Development Goal 15 has a clear target to “end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products.”

To this end, the General Assembly adopted resolutions in 2015 and 2016 aimed at tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife.

And, last year, Parties to CITES – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora – agreed on stronger protection for many species, including a call to urgently shut down domestic ivory markets.

The demand for ivory poses an immediate risk to the survival of African elephants.

Many other species, such as cheetahs, pangolins, rhinos, vultures, sea turtles, sharks, tigers, and high-value timber, are also under pressure.

To combat the poaching and trafficking of protected species we must address both supply and demand.

Strict enforcement of laws is important, but so too is broad awareness among policy makers, affected communities and consumers.

Conservation policies must be science- and livelihood-based.

Communities that live in close proximity to wildlife must be given the incentive and the motivation to protect ecosystems and the precious heritage they contain.

They need to directly benefit from conservation efforts, for example through participating in ecotourism, through employment in protected areas, or through the sustainable use of natural resources.

In Rwanda, conservation of critically endangered mountain gorillas has been successful because the government is committed to using tourism revenue to reduce poverty among communities neighbouring its National Parks.

And it also works with young people, especially our young women.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As consumers, we all have an important role to play.

By supporting ecotourism and insisting on sustainable and fairly traded products, we can help protect habitats and improve opportunities for the communities that live with and depend on wildlife.

And, by refusing to buy illegally or unsustainably traded wildlife products, we can reduce demand.

Young people have a really important role to play, as responsible consumers and agents of change.

Today, we are asking for their awareness and engagement.

Young conservation leaders are already making positive impacts around the world.

They are important wildlife defenders.

In South Africa, many members of the all-female Black Mamba Anti-poaching Unit are youth.

They are fighting on the frontline every day to protect wildlife. And they are an inspiration for walking the talk.

I also salute the Youth for Wildlife Conservation initiative, established by 34 young conservation leaders from around the world who are represented here today.

On this fourth World Wildlife Day, we encourage young people everywhere to speak out and stand up for the world's wildlife.

And we ask everyone, everywhere, to listen to the young voices who are calling for a better world for all, where we can all live in peace and prosperity on a healthy planet.

Thank you.