

Intervention

Agenda no.52 Asian big cats

Thank you Chairman for the floor. I will make a brief intervention and introduce the information document COP14 inf.50.

We commend and thank the excellent work done by the CITES Secretariat in preparing Doc 52 and Annex 7. We endorse the recommendations in Annex 7, and the information document reflects the same.

India agrees that enforcement is crucial for the survival of tigers and other Asian big cats. In order to make the enforcement effective in a professional and collaborative manner, India has notified the establishment of a multi-agency enforcement unit to combat wildlife crime, targeting the organised networks of criminals involved in illicit trafficking of wildlife. India has taken several other milestone initiatives as well for tiger conservation, which include: Strengthening antipoaching activities, amendment of the Wildlife (protection) Amendment Act, 1972 and creation of the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The tiger habitat in the country has been assessed in the GIS domain at the amplification of the administrative sub division of a district. In the last 150 years, tigers have disappeared from almost 80 of our districts. The forest cover status of tiger reserves and their outer periphery has been assessed using remote sensing for protecting the corridors, and the tiger estimation processed has been improved. The assessment highlights the vulnerability of our source populations in tiger reserves and protected areas due to habitat loss and poaching. Instances of trafficking of tiger body parts across borders are alarming. The demand for tiger body parts is depleting our wild tigers, undoing all our efforts. The chances of tiger surviving in the wild are bleak unless and until the demand for its body parts is curbed.

Our experience in implementing Project Tiger for more than 35 years has adequately demonstrated that in-situ conservation has brought back tigers from the brink of extinction. We strongly feel that ban on trade in body parts and derivatives of wild animals has helped the species for survival. There are numerous examples – In India itself ban on tiger hunting and sale of its trophies has helped the species; ban on ivory trade has helped elephants. Therefore we cannot imagine tiger conservation in a scenario where ban on trade in its body parts is lifted or relaxed. Likewise, we strongly oppose any proposal to farm wild carnivores like tiger, which are easy to breed in captivity but difficult to release in the wild. Promoting farming to satiate the demands of oriental medicine would lead to laundering of wild specimens. Further, thecrave for wild body parts would deplete the insitu population under the garb of farmed ones.

The logic being extended by some people that satiating the demand for tiger body parts through supply of farm bred tiger body parts is dangerous. Can we advocate free production and sale of narcotics to satiate the demand for drugs to stop such crimes? We cannot imagine such a situation.

Open sale of tiger body parts through farmed specimens is detrimental to the survival of an umbrella species like tiger, which is symbolic of the well being of an ecosystem. Therefore we strongly urge the Parties to desist from the idea of captive breeding of tigers, and phase out all such programs in the interest of wild tigers.

There has been a decline in some markets for Asian big cat skins due to awareness. We welcome intervention made yesterday from the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, that traditional medicine no longer needs tiger bone, and that they have been actively promoting proven and acceptable substitutes. India supports the strengthening of these efforts to build on this progress.

We feel, that without facilitation from CITES, and without the commitment from Parties to eliminate *all* trade in *all* tiger parts and derivatives at domestic levels, it would not be possible to save wild tigers and other Asian big cats.

For saving wild tigers from extinction, we have to stop all such activities, which foster a demand for tiger parts and derivatives.

We learn that China is committed to its tiger trade ban. We welcome this, and appeal to China to take the exemplary step of phasing out its tiger farms and consolidating and eliminating the stockpiles of Asian big cat body parts and derivatives. Even though this is an internal issue, it has ramifications beyond the borders by having a huge impact on wild tiger conservation in other tiger range States. Therefore, we once again urge the Parties to phase out ex-situ tiger breeding centers on a priority basis to save the remaining population of tigers in the world.

We have submitted an inf .document jointly with Nepal, China and the Russian Federation, which I would now introduce.