

KEY NOTE ADDRESS

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON PANGOLINS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

**Congo Basin Forests Partnership (CBFP),
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Presented by LEKEALEM JOSEPH

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CAMEROON

The Country Director of ZSL Cameroon,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to welcome you here today and express my sincere gratitude to all of you for responding to this roundtable discussion on pangolins in Central Africa holding at the 17th Meeting of the Parties of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It has been revealed that illegal trade in wild animals now ranks third after drugs and weapons. Despite the existence of legal and institutional framework in our different countries and the various international instruments in force, poaching and illegal trafficking of wild animal species still persist.

The general trend today indicates that elephants, rhinos and pangolins are the most poached species primarily for their ivory, horn and scales respectively. Certainly the threats on pangolins have become very serious within the past five years and as you know pangolins are very vulnerable species and very easy to be hunted. The scales and meat are highly demanded in Asian markets for supposedly miraculous healing virtues.

Also, it has been revealed by data from 113 sites in 14 Central African countries, mainly Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo that between 500,000 to 2.7 million pangolins are caught every year in the forests of these countries. In Cameroon, it has also been observed unfortunately that increasing pangolin scales are being smuggled out of the Country. Owing to this worrying situation, the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife took a firm decision in June 2013 to suspend the exploitation and exportation of pangolin scales from Cameroon. As you can see, Cameroon had earlier taken the bull by the horn, long ahead of the Johannesburg CITES CoP 17's decision to up list all pangolin species to appendix I last October 2016 in South Africa.

It should be recalled that Cameroon actively participated and supported the above resolution of COP17, which prohibits the international trade of pangolins. Following the above, the Cameroon government immediately went further to classify all its three pangolins species at the highest protection level by placing them in class A as provided for by the national regulation in force.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The leadership scheme that the Cameroon Government has been trying to enforce for the past years could not be possible without the combined efforts of its technical and financial partners as well as government support from friendly countries. Not being exhaustive, permit me to mention some successful initiatives so far taken:

- The MENTOR-POP program coordinated by ZSL (Progress on pangolins) which has conducted numerous studies on pangolins in 03 three Protected Areas, namely Dja wildlife Reserve, national Parks of Mbam and Djerem, and Campo Ma'an.
- The financial support received from the Government the United States of America through the USFWS to train MINFOF personnel, Customs and Forces of law and order on illegal wildlife trafficking at the International Law Enforcement Academy in Botswana and at the International Chiefs Academy in the US, and prominently,
- The incineration of a stock of 3,000 kg of pangolin scales by the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife during the recent celebration

of the World pangolin day. It should be noted that this act was the first of its kind at national or international level,

- Many seizures of pangolin scales have been operated resulting to over five tons on custody at the judiciary.

However, this determination to eradicate illegal killing and trafficking of pangolin and other important species like the elephants faces several challenges that require the relentless support of the partners that you are, particularly in terms of strengthening anti-poaching capacities over the entire national territory, the continuation of crack down operations, the strengthening of MINFOF / MINDEF anti-poaching collaborative framework, the computerization and securing of the seized stocks and many others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As this round table talks gives us an opportunity to share our experiences and to forge new partnerships to curb illegal wildlife trafficking in general and that of pangolins in particular, let each and every one of us continue to take concrete actions to safe pangolins.

Thank you for your kind attention.