



**WORLD
WILDLIFE DAY**
3 MARCH

Message from the World Customs Organization

World Wildlife Day

The World Customs Organization (WCO) is delighted to join the CITES Secretariat and other United Nations (UN) agencies, as well as other organizations across the globe in celebrating the launch of the first World Wildlife Day on 3 March 2014.

World Wildlife Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly on 20 December 2013 and will be celebrated on 3 March each year, the day the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was adopted.

The aim of this first World Wildlife Day is to celebrate the many beautiful and varied forms of wild fauna and flora, to recognize the multitude of benefits that wildlife provides to people, and to raise awareness of the urgent need to step up the fight against wildlife crime.

The alarming increase in the global wildlife trade led to the recent London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade on 13 February 2014, where I took the opportunity to highlight the contribution and experience of Customs in combating the illicit trade in protected wildlife.

I also used the occasion to brief delegates on WCO activities targeting the illegal wildlife trade, while stressing the need for political will, including an adequate legal framework, resources for training, and partnerships with competent authorities and the private sector.

The Declaration agreed at the London Conference emphasizes the strengthening of law enforcement; this calls for a coordinated enforcement response and sends a strong message of commitment, particularly to African countries that bear the brunt of the illegal wildlife trade, including its detrimental economic, environmental and social consequences.

Enforcement activities

In fact, fighting environment crime remains a top priority for the WCO and Customs administrations as the international community becomes increasingly concerned about the way in which the planet is being degraded through insensitive and often criminal behaviour.

Located at borders, Customs administrations play a vital role in ensuring that all goods being declared for entry or exit are legitimate, while using a variety of enforcement techniques and their proven expertise to detect and intercept illegal wildlife, as well as other illicit goods.

The WCO is very active in organizing global enforcement operations and in supporting regional operations targeting wildlife criminals with the support of its many partners, such as the CITES Secretariat which acknowledges that Customs is one of its key “enforcement arms”.

One example of WCO success in this field is Project GAPIN, a capacity building project in Africa that focused on building the enforcement capabilities of frontline Customs officers to detect, intercept and seize illegal wildlife consignments, and on advocating a culture of integrity.

Another example is Operation COBRA II, supported by the WCO, which resulted in the seizure of 36 rhino horns, three metric tons of elephant ivory, 10,000 turtles, and 1,000 skins of protected species, and more than 100 metric tons of rosewood logs, dealing a huge blow to criminals involved in the highly lucrative trade in illegal wildlife.

In 2009, the WCO launched ENVIRONET – a secure communication tool – to facilitate environment and wildlife enforcement. The tool enables Customs, other competent authorities, international organizations and regional networks to share real-time information as well as reference material, which are essential for successful enforcement.

International cooperation

At the international level, the WCO has continued to enhance cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, that share our commitment to protecting the planet, as well as its wildlife, from criminal syndicates and other illegal activities.

A powerful alliance in which both the WCO and the CITES Secretariat participate, together with the World Bank, INTERPOL and the UNODC, is the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) which was launched in November 2010 with the aim of combating wildlife crime through enhanced cooperation.

The Green Customs Initiative is another long-standing and ongoing cooperation programme that the WCO continues to support along with the CITES Secretariat. This initiative ensures that Customs and other border control officers are well-trained and have all the necessary tools at their disposal to fight wildlife and other environmental crimes.

Strengthening relations with the non-governmental sector is also on the WCO's agenda. In October 2013, the WCO formalized its cooperative relationship with TRAFFIC, a global wildlife trade monitoring network, by signing a Memorandum of Understanding in which the two Parties agree to pool their capacity building efforts and enhance information exchange.

Celebrating our natural heritage

Our wildlife is precious and an essential part of the Earth's rich biodiversity, making it incumbent upon all of us to stand together and take concerted action to protect endangered species from prevailing threats, particularly criminal syndicates operating with impunity around the world.

As 2014 is the WCO Year of Communication with the slogan 'Sharing information for better cooperation', the WCO and its Members will be using every opportunity to put this slogan into effect, including the enhancement of our communication on the illegal wildlife trade and encouraging the sharing of information and intelligence to improve cooperation.

Coming together to celebrate our natural wildlife heritage under the banner of World Wildlife Day makes us pause for thought and makes us realize how precious our wildlife is and why it is so important to protect it for the generations that will follow us.

My very best wishes to all on this first World Wildlife Day.

Kunio Mikuriya
Secretary General