



## OUR RESOURCES OUR RIGHTS

### **Open letter: Stop the hypocrisy – a call for the genuine inclusion of African communities in decisions about our wildlife**

As representatives of millions of rural Africans who live alongside dangerous and charismatic wild animals, we urgently call on international decision-makers to reject hypocritical laws and policies that ignore African perspectives and trample our rights as custodians of our wildlife. It is time to stop talking about African wildlife without Africans at the discussion table.

In the United Kingdom, countries in the European Union, and the United States of America, legislation has been proposed to ban the importation of animal parts that have been obtained through legal, regulated hunting. In some cases, the proposals are limited to particular animal species, most of which are African (e.g., [in Finland](#), trade restrictions are proposed for lion, elephant, rhinoceros and hippopotamus). [In the USA](#), the proposed Bill effectively prevents lion and elephant imports from Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia – with no clear reason provided for this discrimination. The [United Kingdom](#) has proposed blanket import bans for all animal parts, with no consideration of the conservation status of the species involved or the economic impact on affected countries and communities. [Italy](#) has proposed banning imports of all species listed in Appendix I and II of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), even for species where legal trade of hunting trophies is allowed under CITES regulations.

These proposed laws and policies are fundamentally hypocritical. First, all of the countries mentioned above maintain domestic hunting industries and permit the export of animal parts acquired by hunters. If passed, bans on importing animal parts would present unjust trade sanctions. Countries in southern Africa that allow regulated, legal hunting of African wildlife for the same reasons that hunting is allowed in Europe or the USA, would be negatively affected. This double standard disregards African rights to the sustainable use of wildlife, whilst upholding the rights of Europeans and North Americans.

Second, the countries proposing to restrict trade in African wildlife have a poorer conservation track record than those in southern Africa that will be most negatively affected by these laws. Our nine countries – Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe – jointly host the largest populations of African savannah elephant, black and white rhinoceros, lion, and common hippopotamus in the world.



## OUR RESOURCES OUR RIGHTS

Our countries and our communities have invested heavily in the conservation of these and other species, efforts that rely heavily on income from international hunting tourism. Our ability to conserve these species will therefore be hampered by proposals that arbitrarily seek to restrict international hunting markets. While these bans are theoretically driven by conservation concerns, the [conservation science](#) on this topic demonstrates that trophy hunting is not a key threat to any of the species listed, but can have marked positive conservation impacts by helping safeguard against the real key threats, such as habitat loss and poaching. Policies should be driven by the best available science, and these are directly counter to such evidence from conservation science.

Third, the processes and media coverage related to these proposals amplify the opinions of animal rights campaigners who clearly have no interest in the lived experiences of African people. The misinformation spread by these campaign groups deliberately [misleads](#) the general public and policy-makers in order to generate support for the proposed laws. Despite many efforts, African community representatives are rarely granted opportunities to present our views and explain how these laws and policies will affect our livelihoods and conservation efforts.

For Africans, these are not theoretical considerations, as they may be for Western supporters of these laws and policies. We have lost loved ones to dangerous wild animals such as hippopotamus, elephant, buffalo and big cat species. Survivors of these attacks have suffered horrific injuries and permanent disabilities. We have experienced food insecurity and financial hardship due to crop and livestock losses caused by elephants, lions, leopards and cheetahs. We nonetheless remain custodians of these animals and other threatened species such as black rhinoceros.

Without the active involvement of African rural communities in conservation, our animals will suffer the same fate as the large and charismatic animals that once roamed freely throughout North America and Europe. As you have experienced in your own countries, economic benefits from the sustainable use of wild animals provide strong incentives for rural people to conserve biodiversity.

These hypocritical proposals come at a time when international conservation bodies are increasingly recognising the critical role of Indigenous People and Local Communities in biodiversity conservation. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) both recognise the importance of sustainable use of plants and animals for supporting rural livelihoods and biodiversity conservation. The recent IPBES [summary report](#) on sustainable use states: *“People in vulnerable situations are often most reliant*



## OUR RESOURCES OUR RIGHTS

*on wild species and are most likely to benefit from more sustainable forms of use of wild species to secure their livelihoods (well established)."*

Within Africa, the [Kigali Call to Action](#) from the Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC) held in Rwanda calls for: *"Promotion of truly sustainable use of natural resources and investment in building an appropriate wildlife economy, through rights-based approaches and with involvement of rights-holders and stakeholders"*. Similarly, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in [Resolution 489](#) calls on African states *"to recognize the rights of indigenous populations & communities over the conservation, control, management and sustainable use of their natural resources including wildlife."*

The proposed laws and policies in the UK, USA, Italy and Finland thus contradict their domestic hunting policies, amplify the opinions of non-African lobby groups over African views and conservation efforts, and ignore global and African commitments to the sustainable use of biodiversity.

We therefore appeal to policy-makers in Europe and North America for fair and equal treatment: 1) that our people have equal opportunities to benefit from international hunting markets that your people do; 2) that policy-makers grant African community representatives from the most affected countries a fair hearing; 3) that all decisions take into account our countries' successful conservation track records and efforts to coexist with dangerous wild animals.

African wild animals are globally revered and valued, and yet African people are often neglected as the custodians of this wildlife. Policy makers in the Global North can remedy this situation by genuinely including African perspectives in decisions that affect our wildlife and our people. **We hereby call on policy-makers to reject legislative proposals that will negatively affect African people and wildlife through counter-productive restrictions on legal, sustainable use of biodiversity.**

With regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rodgers Lubilo".

Dr Rodgers Lubilo

CLN Chairperson

19 Lossen Street, Ausspannplatz, Windhoek, Namibia  
Tel: +26461 230 888 Email: [info@communityleadersnetwork.org](mailto:info@communityleadersnetwork.org)  
Web: [www.communityleadersnetwork.org](http://www.communityleadersnetwork.org)