

MEDIA RELEASE

26-February-2024

For immediate release

Rural communities in Botswana concerns over anti-hunting laws in the UK

On 22 February 2024, 17 Community Trusts in Botswana along with the Ngamiland Council of NGOs (NCONGO) expressed their deep concern with a campaign advocating for a ban on hunting trophy imports into the United Kingdom (UK) that will negatively affect their livelihoods and wildlife conservation efforts. These Trusts are democratically elected entities speaking on behalf of their respective communities that live alongside elephants and other wildlife species in Botswana.

They expressed their dismay that the former President of Botswana (Seretse Khama Ian Khama) who enacted a hunting ban during his term of office is lending his support to this anti-hunting campaign in the UK. The former President's hunting ban during 2014-2018 resulted in the loss of income and employment among these communities, leading to food insecurity, worsening poverty and increased elephant poaching levels as communities were disempowered to conserve their wildlife.

These communities therefore speak from hard experience with anti-hunting legislation and are determined that their voices are heard before similar actions are taken without proper consultation. Income derived from hunting and other wildlife-based industries are critically important for these communities, allowing their Community Trusts to function and deliver benefits at the grassroots level. When this income was cut off in 2014-2018, Community Trusts that depended on income from trophy hunting could no longer function properly and produce benefits for their communities.

Communities in Botswana are the custodians of the largest population of African savannah elephants in the world, along with numerous other ecologically important species that share the Kavango-Zambezi Trans-frontier Conservation Area with four other countries (Angola, Namibia,

Zambia and Zimbabwe). These communities often suffer the consequences of living with large and dangerous wildlife, yet they are committed to conserving these species.

As the Community Leaders Network of Southern Africa, a representative body of communities living in 13 countries including Botswana, we hereby fully support the letter submitted by the Ngamiland Council of NGOs and signed by Botswana's Community Trusts. We further support our own governments' positions on this matter, as expressed in letters and other correspondence in this regard.

Southern Africa has decades of experience with regulated, sustainable trophy hunting, which makes significant contributions to community-based natural resource management in our region. Our countries are recognised as forerunners in the conservation of elephants, lions, cheetahs, rhinoceros, African wild dog, and many more species of global concern. Any proposed legislation relating to trophy hunting must therefore consider the experiences and perspectives of local communities and their respective governments based on meaningful and thorough consultations.

The proposed UK hunting trophy import ban and similar proposed bans in other European countries will have severe negative impacts on communities that live alongside and conserve African wildlife across our region. Our ability to conserve these animals in the face of high levels of human-wildlife conflict and other pressures will be greatly hindered by these import bans.

We cannot remain silent while countries that do not host any of these species make decisions that cause our communities and our wildlife to suffer. We call on all UK and other European decision-makers to listen to communities in Botswana and the rest of southern Africa before implementing any bans on hunting trophy imports.

Dr. Rodgers Lubilo

Chairperson, Community Leaders Network – Southern Africa