
Bangkok Conference on Science, Technology, and Innovation for Addressing Wildlife and Forest Crimes and Attaining SDGs

Closing Statement by AIT**Bangkok Conference on Science, Technology and Innovation for addressing Wildlife and Forest Crimes and Attaining SDGs**

BANGKOK, 1st September 2018 – Scientists, policy-makers and technocrats from thirty (30) countries of Africa and Asia assembled at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) for the *'Bangkok Conference on Science, Technology and Innovation for addressing Wildlife and Forest Crimes and Attaining SDGs'*. The objective of the conference was to highlight the pressing problems in tackling wildlife and forest crimes and outline innovative technologies and cooperative policy frameworks in implementation to address them.

Addressing the conference, the Right Honorable President Bidya Devi Bhandari of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal expressed a firm commitment to counter transnational wildlife crime and emphasized the need for common understanding, commitment and stressed for a strategy to enhance South–South cooperation among countries from the larger south, to build a common platform, information-sharing modalities, and derive at creative and practical solutions to address the current challenges and attain SDGs.

According to H.E. Malik Amin Aslam, Adviser to the Right Honorable Prime Minister on Climate Change, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as illegal trade has become more sophisticated and rampant, there is a need for broader cooperation and an international cross-regional mechanism to address the problem. He further highlighted the importance of a sustainable means of transboundary cooperation and transboundary collaboration at a regional and global level.

Dr. Vijarn Simachaya, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Kingdom of Thailand underscored the need to enhance intergovernmental cooperation for meeting the technological commitments in addressing wildlife crime.

On behalf of Mr. Shakti Bahadur Basnet, Minister of the Ministry of Forests and Environment of the Government of Nepal, Mr. Man Bahadur Khadka, Director General of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation stressed on transcontinental cooperation among law enforcement agencies and partner organizations for synergized outcome.

During the plenary sessions, National Institute for Environmental Studies, Japan and Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Thailand showcased technological innovations through DNA and Molecular technology that can be used to track potential crimes. United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes, INTERPOL and World Customs Organization shared concrete experiences to demonstrate utility, challenges, and the limitations of such technologies. The session established the need for resource sharing among agencies at national and international levels to strengthen capacities of the global south on applications of science, technology and innovations.

Scientists and policy-makers also discussed about the use of geospatial infrastructures such as the National Spatial Data Infrastructures (NSDI) and cloud-based geospatial databases; while learning about applications of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for day-to-day monitoring and anti-poaching alert technologies for round-the-clock monitoring. The session identified the importance of standardized common platform for information collection, management and sharing.

Practitioners and researchers presented information management systems currently in use at grassroots, national and international levels, and data-sharing platforms, and highlighted integration of technologies and



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empowerment of communities to effectively propagate wildlife law enforcement and counter wildlife and forest crimes. The session emerged with the need for right mix of technology, attitude and enforcement to be supported by appropriate information management system as well as suggested on the establishment of a working group to assess different systems in use in different contexts.

The conference participants also recognized the importance of capacity building through deliberately targeted cooperation among state and non-state actors and media for awareness raising and behavioral change among consumers. Transparent disclosure of information and use of and innovative approaches to support members states within and across the regional networks were also outlined. As several African and Asian countries remain unequipped on infrastructural gaps in combating transnational crime, there is a need for a comprehensive evaluation to understand the depth of capacity challenges and on the root causes of noncompliance on the ground. Experts underlined the value of regular assessments to identify institutional and financial needs in the countries, which will ensure directed interventions at all levels.

The assessment conducted by AIT and supported by UNDP, confirmed the fact that there remain cumbersome technocratic and policy-oriented challenges in data management and data-sharing. Even though there has been large flow of funding to meet the infrastructural demands in the global south, the lack of skilled persons, disruptive power supplies and challenges of connectivity remain as a major hurdle in timely information exchange. In addition, species-specific problems concerning the trade of Rhino horn and Pangolins were also discussed during the conference.

A proposed creative modality was to develop a wildlife conservation lens, a simplified tool for practitioners and project managers, for SDGs-related projects under consideration or under implementation to evaluate if their impacts and utility for wildlife conservation at large. Hence, the interconnectivity between the different SDG's should be explored through development of various overarching tools for practitioners and policy-makers.

As Asia and Africa remain at the forefront of challenges posed by wildlife and forest crimes, it was proposed to understand and explore the need for an 'enhanced south-south cooperation architecture' to advance collaboration towards information sharing and skills enhancement between the countries. The Royal Government of Thailand, co-host of the conference, announced the "Bangkok Initiative" geared at providing technical assistance and discussing modalities of information sharing among countries in the south. The initiative will be introduced at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment in the mid-2019.

Panelists in the final panel discussion presented the concept of a multi-layered architecture connecting political levels with the community of practice and international cooperation in the South. The architecture entitled "South-South Enhanced Cooperation Initiative" is envisioned to provide a platform at the highest level of politics to regularly convene heads of states and heads of governments from the Global South and articulate the agenda based on their needs in terms of wildlife protection and biodiversity conservation. This entity, which has yet to be structured and defined, shall provide support to Track 1 dialogues through a secretariat and demand-driven researches, and will then facilitate a follow up dialogue at the Track 1.5 level, or between States from the Global South and the existing wildlife and conservation stakeholders to align their activities along the agenda articulated by heads of states and heads of governments and the identified needs of the Global South.



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Representatives from participating countries backed up the proposal and underscored the need of such mechanism where the countries from the South (which are mainly facing the brunt of wildlife and forest crimes) provide much needed leadership and articulate challenges to catalyze implementation of activities targeted at multiple SDGs.

Subsequently, representatives of participating countries agreed to set up an Experts Working Group from countries of the larger South to define the overall structure of the architecture and mandated within the next six (6) months. It was stressed that the group must be inclusive and representative of diverse regions of larger south. This working group would undertake a detailed study to conceptualize South-South Enhanced Cooperation Initiative, particularly assess the focus and location for a south-led mechanism to promote south-south cooperation through a formal set-up. The Experts' Working Group's views would also be elicited to identify core principles of enhanced cooperation; utility of technical facility; and urgent needs requiring collective efforts.

In the closing remarks, Mr. Man Bahadur Khadka expressed commitment on behalf of the Government of Nepal and South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network to take the outcome of the conference forward and emphasized on the need of extended collaboration among participating countries and regional institutions, namely ASEAN Center for Biodiversity, Lusaka Agreement Task Force and South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network. Similarly, Dr. Pinsak Suraswadi expressed hope that the key wildlife enforcement networks would take turns to hold regular meetings for knowledge transference on wildlife and timber trafficking in the global south. Mr. Edward Phiri expressed readiness to collaborate transcontinentally in the fight against wildlife and forest crimes and committed to take the outcome of the conference forward to engage greater Africa.

