



CNRG STATEMENT ON ELEPHANT CULLING

Harare –18 September 2024 - The Centre for Natural Resource Governance (**CNRG**) has learned with shock and deep concern a decision made by the government to slaughter 200 elephants ostensibly to feed hungry citizens and reduce the elephant population, said to be way over the country's carrying capacity. We argue that the decision is unsustainable and does very little to address the drought effects or the conservation cause.

We fear this is a major policy reversal that defeats excellent conservation work championed by the government and private players over the past four decades. The move has the potential to open floodgates for poaching, especially bearing in mind that the poisoning of elephants and smuggling of ivory has been a continuous challenge over the years. CNRG is aware of a thriving illicit ivory market in Asia operated by a web of transnational organized crime actors.

Further, when announcing the decision to cull the elephants – the government conflated several issues. These are conservation, selling ivory for profit, nutrition for drought-stricken villagers, and reducing human-wildlife conflict. The real motive remains unclear.

Although we acknowledge the devastating effects of one of the worst droughts in decades, we do not believe the meat of 200 elephants will fill that food deficit. According to the Zimbabwe Livelihoods Assessment Committee (ZIMLAC) about 6 million people in rural areas and 1.7 million in urban areas – more than half the country's population – will need food assistance between now and the next harvest. A robust, well-thought-out and sustainable strategy to feed the hungry population is required.

We further note that Zimbabwe's staple food remains maize, supplemented by other small grains such as corn, sorghum, finger millet, wheat, and rice. These are what makes the difference between starvation and food security, not elephant meat.

We also find the threat by the Minister of Environment, Climate, and Wildlife to pull out of CITES on account that it restrains them from selling ivory to be disconcerting. We cannot overemphasize the value of live elephants to the tourism sector and the Zimbabwean economy in general. If managed properly, Zimbabwe's tourism sector can be a \$20 billion economy, creating tens of thousands of jobs.

We believe Elephants to be ecosystem engineers – the heart and soul of tourism – often attracting other animal species that feed off the trees they bring down, especially during the peak of the dry season. Other species also seek refuge from predators among or near elephants. Elephants are more profitable alive than dead.

We view the work of CITES as complementing Zimbabwe's world-renowned wildlife conservation laws and policies.

CNRG calls on the Government to do the following:

- Appeal for financial assistance to translocate elephants from overpopulated regions to underpopulated regions

- Cancel the plan to cull elephants and engage with various stakeholders in finding sustainable solutions both to the drought challenge, conservation concerns and the human-wildlife conflict
- Identify domestic resources to acquire staple food to feed those most vulnerable to drought.
- Intensify international appeals for humanitarian aid to feed the drought-stricken population.
- Accelerate the amendments to the Wildlife Act, taking into consideration the need to preserve Zimbabwe's wildlife heritage whilst de-escalating the human-wildlife conflict

Centre for Natural Resource Governance is a leading research and advocacy organization championing climate justice and wildlife conservation, land rights, human rights, environmental integrity and anti-corruption in the natural resources sector.

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