

Namibia threatens to withdraw CITES membership



LIVINGSTONE - Environment and tourism minister Pohamba Shifeta has come out strongly against CITES' decision to ban ivory from being sold on international markets.

In an interview with *New Era* on the sidelines of the just-ended KAZA summit in Livingstone, he said if the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) refuses member states to sell off ivory stockpiles, they will withdraw their membership.

“If CITES refuses, we have some alternatives and plans. We can go for arbitration. This arbitration is provided for by the World Trade Organisation, which international law allows especially when we are unnecessarily or unreasonably refused or restrained from exercising our rights as member states. Or, we have to look at other alternatives to completely withdraw from CITES,” he threatened.

Shifeta said Namibia is ahead of many countries when it comes to community-based natural resources' management programmes' which are well-planned. Equally, he lauded Namibia for having more well-managed conservancies.

“CITES should be flexible in this matter because we must utilise these natural resources. When it comes to our wildlife, we must be allowed to sustainably utilise, especially for conservation hunting. It should be part of it. We have stockpiles of ivory and rhino horns. We must be allowed to sell them on the international markets. This time, we have decided that KAZA and the SADC region which has the largest population of the big five, will take it up at CITES next year when we go to Geneva for COP20, that we should be allowed to sell off these stockpiles. KAZA alone has more than a US\$1 billion in monetary value. We need to sell off these stockpiles so we can plough back into conservation efforts of our five countries,” he insisted.

“KAZA has so many natural resources. It has the largest population of African elephants in the whole world. We are saying we must be allowed to utilise sustainably our natural resources to benefit our

local communities who live side by side with these animals. We have more than 228 000 elephants that live in the KAZA area. And with this large elephant population, the carrying capacity can no longer take it because we have more elephants in this KAZA area,” Shifeta mentioned.

His views were re-affirmed, as the summit considered options available within and outside CITES, including diplomatic engagement, withdrawal, reservations, arbitration and trading with non-CITES parties to benefit from wildlife and wildlife products.

As part of the summit communique, KAZA partner states were urged to fully prepare and participate at the upcoming dialogue meeting planned for August 2024 in Botswana, including the holding of at least two preparatory meetings to develop a Regional Common Position for CITES COP20.

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