

# Nigeria restates commitment to end wildlife crimes

The Nigerian government says it will not relent in its efforts in the fight against wildlife crime in the country.

Nigeria's Minister of State for Environment Dr Iziaq Salako stated this at the "*public unveiling of an elephant sculpture constructed from the pulverized Wildlife stockpile*" held in Abuja, Nigeria's capital.

He said that the government would be resolute in enforcing laws and upscale the deployment of technology in fighting wildlife criminals.

*"I must warn that those engaged in the crime of illegal wildlife trade are very tenacious and do not give up easily.*

*"Demand for wild animals' parts and derivatives persists with a surge in black markets for sale of illegally acquired wildlife parts with the impact of such demand aggravated by the globalization of the world economy.* he said"

He also urged Nigerians to support the government in the fight against illegal wild life trafficking by providing intelligence, discouraging animal poaching, and refusing to use products that are not ethically sourced, including from online sources.

*"We need wildlife for our survival, well being and prosperity as they maintain ecological balance, provide critical ecosystem systems, maintain the food chain, and they keep us connected to nature,"* he said.

The Minister said the fight against Illegal Wildlife requires a collaborative approach and working with other agencies of government in law enforcement.

*"Especially the Nigeria Custom Service, the millitary, Nigeria Police, National Park Service, ICPC, Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit and other relevant agencies.*

*"In the spirit of collaboration, I wish to use this opportunity to commend the exemplary enforcement action of the Nigeria Customs Service, NCS which resulted in a recent seizure of Pangolin scales and its derivatives worth over 3 billion Naira along Kebbi State axis,"* he explained

*The Minister also appealed for stronger collaboration through information sharing and chain of custody when interception/seizure of wildlife items is made by the Nigeria Customs Service, NCS. NESREA being the agency of the federal government of the Nigeria with the mandate to enforce the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the CITES designated authority in the country.*

*"As a result of the single window trade system of the federal government, environmental officers are no longer operating in our ports and borders.*

*"NESRESA, therefore, relies on the NCS to facillitate the enforcement of CITES and other international environmental agreements bordering on wildlife."* he stated.

Dr Salako said that the Federal Ministry of Environment would continue to do everything possible to ensure that the ministry plays its part in harnessing the country's natural resources for sustainable development.

*"The crushing of the stockpile which were under the custody of the Nigeria Environmental Standards Regulation and Enforcement Agency (NESREA) became the first of its kind in the country and of the few such exercise in the world.*

*"I did promise at that Jan 9th event that the powder obtained from the pulverisation exercise will be used to build a monument in memory of hundred of elephants killed illegally and as a symbol of our unwavering commitment to wildlife conservation.*

*"Today, in fulfilment of that promise, it is a thing of joy for me to be part of the event for the unveiling of an elephant statue built from the crushed tusks and ivory."*

*"I am happy to see that the journey started on January 9th, 2024 has now been carried to a logical conclusion.*

*"Let me therefore seize this opportunity to congratulate NESREA and our partners that contributed to making today a reality."* The Minister added.

The Director General of NESREA, Dr Innocent Barikor, said that the event is the first of its kind in the history of Nigeria's fight against wildlife crime since 1975 that the Convention in International Trade in Endangered species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) came into force and its domestication by Nigeria in 1985 through the Endangered Species Act that is currently undergoing review.

The DG said that the event is to encourage stakeholders to be resolute and not to give up in the fight against Illegal Wildlife Trade.

He noted that NESREA would continue to work in collaboration with other relevant federal and state government agencies, including non-Governmental and civil societal organizations in Nigeria.

***“I would like to particularly commend the laudable support received so far from our key development partners like the Elephant Protection Initiative Foundation (EPIF), United Nations office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), United State Embassy, World Conservation Society (WCS) Wild Africa, etc.***

***“They have been supportive and assisting the agency on diverse training and workshop exercises, including financial support and procurement of enforcement tools.”***

According to him, ***“National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) is the designated CITES Enforcement Authority after the restructuring processes of CITES implementation in Nigeria just at the time of lifting a trade ban on Nigeria in 2011.”***

The DG NESREA, also commended the management of the National Parks Service and the Minister for his unwavering support since the beginning of the disposal exercise.

The unveiling of an Elephant Sculpture moulded from the pulverized wildlife specimen is a symbol of the Nigerian government zero tolerance to illegal wildlife trade.

The elephant statue was built from the crushed tusks and ivory.