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Statement

by

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FAO Regional Representative for Africa

on the occasion of

WEST AFRICA BUSH MEAT CONFERENCE
(Accra, Ghana, 22-24 February 2005)

Madam Chairperson, Honourable Mrs Christine Churcher, Minister of Environment and Science,
Honourable Prof. Dominic Fobih, Minister of Lands, Forestry and Mines,
Mrs Ya NTiamoa Baidu, WWF Programme Director for West and Central Africa,
Distinguished Guests,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a real pleasure for me to participate, on behalf of FAO, in this important Conference which is being organized in partnership with WWF International, Ghana Wildlife Society and the Ghana Office of Conservation International. We are profoundly grateful to our partners for the excellent collaboration which permitted this project to become a reality.

Madam Chair, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

As we are no doubt aware, in Africa, wild animals have always significantly contributed to the protein needs of the population, especially in rural areas where bush meat is reported to account for up to 75% of protein supply in most countries of the West Moist Africa. Communities in this

region, as in many parts of Africa, have from time immemorial depended on locally available biological resources for food, medicine and materials for shelter.

Wildlife in West Africa and in many parts of Central Africa is under pressure, not only from rising demand for bushmeat by rural populations but also from the shrinking and degradation of the places that most wildlife can comfortably survive. West Africa lost 60% or more of its forest areas by the 1980's, which has in turn precipitated tremendous decline of wildlife populations. The pressure on wildlife varies from country to country and from ecological zone to another.

Since the colonial period, in most of Anglophone and Francophone West Africa, policies and legislations on wildlife have been mostly oriented to conservation, especially with the creation of National Parks and Reserves, and to Game hunting in specific areas. Only subsistence hunting was allowed to local communities. However, from the 1970's to the 80's, bush meat trade grew up rapidly alongside with urbanization and the worsening living conditions in rural areas.

Over the last decade, the demand for this commodity has in many countries exceeded the capacity of the wildlife resources to sustainably cope with the level of exploitation. This led Governments to adopt policy and regulatory frameworks guiding the utilization and trade of bushmeat. In some cases, the utilization and trade of bushmeat are officially prohibited or restricted. However, the effectiveness of these measures is often hampered among other things by lack of adequate information, education, and poor response of local people who are the primary users and dependants on this resource.

Madam Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Unfortunately, bush meat for purely local subsistence is very poorly documented. Thus, the role of wild meat in directly combating food insecurity is not sufficiently known. In West Africa, bush meat trade according to FAO 2000 Publication, is an informal enterprise which caters for the livelihood of a substantial number of people. Transactions start with the hunter and involve middlemen and traders in various markets. One of the major outlets for bush meat are the restaurants and bars located in various places, usually near rural markets and/or trading centres.

The last few years, it has been reported that bush meat trade also is increasingly becoming internationalised. It is estimated that in West Africa alone, foreign trade in bush meat amounted to US \$150 to 160 M in year 2000, excluding the export income revenue from wild animal which is accounted for in the Gross Domestic Product.

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The bush meat issue, mostly in West and Central Africa, cannot be analyzed in-depth without including public health and food safety aspects.

A major concern of public health and bush meat consumption comes from two main reasons: i.e. consumption of bush meat polluted with pesticides and other dangerous chemicals used in hunting, and contact with animal pathogens.

Regarding the latter, Ebola in Central Africa, Rift Valley Fever in West Africa, and Congo-Crimea Hemorrhagic Fever in East Africa attest to the risk. Research is beginning to indicate patterns of sero-prevalence and to confirm relationships between human and non-human primate strains of various viral diseases. These indications demand further study to uncover outbreak risks, mechanisms of resistance, or both depending upon the economic and ecological changes in the human communities being considered.

I am delighted to note that these issues are in the agenda of this conference and I have no doubt that the eminent experts and resource persons will give them due attention.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

FAO has been involved in many activities designed to address what is commonly called “the bush meat crisis” in West and Central Africa. The Organization commissioned two studies on “Bush meat and Food Security” and “Bush meat Consumption and Trade in West Africa”, which were released in 1997 and 2000 respectively. FAO has also assisted, in collaboration with other

Partners, in “Bush meat surveys in a few countries in West Africa, and supported workshops and expert consultations in Central Africa.

The African Working Party on the Management of Wildlife and Protected Areas of the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission, included bush meat in its agenda during both its 14th and 15th sessions in 2002 and 2004 respectively, and the FAO Regional Conference for Africa, held in Johannesburg in March 2004, discussed a paper on: “The bush meat crisis in Africa, reconciling food security and biodiversity conservation”.

This clearly is an indication of the interest and commitment of our Organization to address the various facets of the bush meat issue, which all fall within its international mandate. In this respect, we have established strong partnership with Sub-Regional and Regional Institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations and Private Organizations interested in the bush meat issue. This workshop is one among the different collaborative initiatives supported by FAO.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Countries in the West and Central Africa have various forms of legislation and policies dealing with the hunting and marketing of bush meat. It is important to point out that although some national policies do recognize that wildlife populations are being seriously depleted (for example policies in Ghana and Guinea), no legislation in West Africa addresses the bush meat problem per se.

During the Ministerial Conference on “African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (AFLEG)”, held in November 2003 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, African Ministers issued a declaration which called for development of mechanisms to finance support for forest law enforcement and governance initiatives in order to address, among others, the issue of sustainable management of wildlife. I take the opportunity to encourage this Conference to come up with concrete and implementable recommendations to Governments in this regard.

It should be noted that the demand for bush meat, both at national and international levels offers business opportunities to exploit major wildlife species through domestication. This would contribute in combating poverty and improving access to food products while preserving

biological diversity. Next door experiences in Southern and Eastern Africa can be advantageously borrowed and adapted to the context of West Africa, in this regard. Even here in West Africa, the grass cutter, the guinea fowl and a number of other species have been successfully domesticated and commercialised.

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude this address by thanking the Government of the Republic of Ghana, the World Wildlife Fund International and the Ghana Office of Conservation International, without whose cooperation and support this conference would not have been possible. I am profoundly grateful to their Excellencies, the Minister of Environment and Science and the Minister of Land, Forestry and Mines for honouring us with their presence. I thank the organizers for the painstaking arrangement that has been made for a comfortable and rewarding conference. I thank you all for your audience.