



Faith commitment on the Illegal Wildlife Trade

His All-Holiness Bartholomew as well as His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, and the clergy and the laity of the Greek Orthodox Churches of Africa, call for an immediate end to the illegal wildlife trade which is plundering and abusing creation and threatening the annihilation of precious animal species. The illegal trade in wildlife negatively impacts on every country's natural resources and adversely affects local communities that should essentially be benefiting from legal, sustainable trade. Thousands of wildlife species including *inter-alia*, the rhinoceros, elephants, lions and leopards are threatened by the burgeoning illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade. His All-Holiness in particular has made concerted efforts to promote sustainability and is concerned with efforts to bring a cessation to the rapid rate of degradation which is befalling the natural environment which we so dearly cherish. He has consequently been active in the creation of conservation programmes by Orthodox churches globally. The keen interest of both His-All Holiness and His Beatitude are undoubtedly inspired and informed by the teachings of the Church and the examples set by the Early Church Fathers.

Humanity, as the custodians of creation and in imitation of the love of God, is called upon to care for and love the earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ displayed a great appreciation for the beauty of nature as did many of our Church Fathers. Nature is used constantly as an exemplar of Christian living and teaching and yet evil, greed and corruption threaten her. We will increase our efforts through educational campaigns and of course, prayer, to strengthen and promote the notion of conservation as an imperative for the survival of our fragile planet. Consequently, as people of faith, we must use our collective efforts to combat the evils that threaten our world. Our Orthodox tradition maintains the belief that we are all part and parcel of the purpose of Our Creator for life on earth. We cannot thus be silent or inactive when the degradation of our planet is threatening to be catastrophic. The illegal wildlife trade is a grave threat to a wide range of endangered species and cannot be allowed to continue given that it is threatening to derail many years of dedicated conservation work and is rapidly leading to the extinction of our precious heritage. We are also thankful and mindful of the fact that many game rangers have

offered their lives as a sacrifice to protect what God has given us. We are duty bound to take decisive action to be worthy custodians of the earth. As the Psalmist extols the authority given to man as a sign of glory and honour from God: 'You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea' (Ps 8:6-8).

All of us are clearly subject not only to the natural laws but also to ethical and moral ones, which sadly, continue to be violated with impunity by some people who have strayed from God's intended role for them.

Job 12:7-10 - But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

With fraternal blessings and love

+Metropolitan Seraphim

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