

Testimony of Dr. Muchazondida Mkono

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Chairman,

Ranking member,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to talk to you on a subject which has significant implications for the conservation of charismatic megafauna in Africa, many of which are now threatened with extinction. To illustrate, a century ago, there were more than 200, 000 lions in the African wild. The number has fallen to around 20, 000, a reduction of 90% in that short space of time. Clearly, something is not working. Trophy hunting has NOT stopped this sharp decline in populations.

About three years ago, as part of my research, I visited Hwange National Park, where Cecil lived, before he was brutally killed by Walter Palmer on July 1, 2015. I was heartbroken to learn that as of that year, the only 6 surviving rhinos at the Park had been moved to a 24 hour guarded conservancy. There were none left there, for visitors to see. Zero. I asked how this could be the case, when hunting occurring in adjacent conservancies was supposed to be working for conservation of endangered species. The answer I got was what we have always known. The trophy hunting system is corrupt; the money ends up in the pockets of a powerful few; very, very little is channelled back to conservation.

The truth is that trophy hunting is a rich-boys-club that is of little benefit to wildlife and local, rural communities. A 2013 report by Economists at Large reveals that communities receive only about 3% of the gross revenue from trophy hunting.

During my fieldwork, when I was talking to people in the rural district of Hwange, they reported earning no more than \$3 per household in income, per year, from the proceeds of hunting.

In a few cases, hunting revenues have funded the purchase of a communal grinding mill, or the drilling of a borehole, but such cases are the exception, certainly not the norm. And even then, the benefits are token, to put it mildly, and the surrounding communities continue to live in abject poverty, despite decades of state sanctioned hunting happening in their vicinity.

It is incumbent on all of us who care about these majestic animals— lions, elephants, and others— to demand better from the relevant authorities. I believe the Cecil Act will help to send this message clearly. These beautiful animals are worth more alive than dead. I think of all of the busloads of tourists who would have enjoyed seeing the charismatic Cecil at Hwange National Park, to this day, had his life not been cut short. He should have had the opportunity to thrive for many more years, and sire more offspring, as nature intended.

If megafauna should be killed in the name of conservation, at the very least, there must be clear and convincing evidence that the revenues will go towards tangible conservation outcomes.

I regret very much the recent decision by President Masisi of Botswana to reverse the ban on hunting that was instituted by his predecessor, President Khama.

We know that hunters often flout the relevant codes of conduct and regulations. They use baits to lure animals out of non-hunting zones, and shoot animals that fall below the required age threshold. Quotas are not always adhered to due to greed and corruption. And

when they are caught doing the wrong thing, hunters go scot-free, for many reasons.

I put to you that the image of conservation is not of a proud hunter squatting next to his trophy—a dead lion, or rhino, or giraffe—conservation entails the work of organisations such as Akashinga who are working day and night to protect animals from poaching; organisations that fund wildlife research; training rangers, ensuring that animals have access to water when there are droughts, communities investing in teaching young people to value wildlife, working to ensure that migration corridors for wildlife are restored. That, I submit to you, is conservation.

It has been claimed that non-consumptive forms of wildlife tourism are not lucrative enough to sustain conservation efforts. If we stop trophy hunting, it is said, wildlife will lose its economic value for local communities and the habitat will be lost to other land uses. In my view, well managed, non-consumptive wildlife tourism is sufficient for funding and managing conservation.

In a 2017 study, residents of Mababe village in Botswana noted that, compared to hunting, which is seasonal, photographic camps were more beneficial to the community because people are employed all year round. But the importance of moving away from hunting goes beyond the economic benefits from non-consumptive wildlife approaches. It is also about fostering a culture of respect and care for these majestic animals.

My final words are this, when visiting Africa, bring a camera, not a gun.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.