Ending the Ivory Bloodshed

Dr. Donald Kaberuka
President
I join those who preceded me to commend the UK Government, The Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cambridge, and Prince Harry for this landmark initiative. This morning the Chair said, and I quote: “This is the time for political will, global leadership and resources to deal with this threat.” We can all endorse that conclusion.

We know the problem. Illegal wildlife is now a definite threat to African development and sustainability. We know the possible solutions. They are contained in the declaration before us today. We know what must now be done to fully enforce the law and international conventions.

Countries of destination must assume their responsibility to address the problem on the demand side. Above all we must find means to support sustainability of the affected communities.

This London Communiqué is comprehensive. Our challenge now is to gather the political will and implementation. We welcome the bold commitments announced this morning. We applaud the measures announced by President Obama yesterday banning sale of such products as ivory. The announcement that there will be appointed a UN Special Envoy is very much welcome.

Many speakers have observed that what we are facing is no longer simply a conservation issue. It is a phenomenon which undermines Africa’s development. The violence and damage now threaten revenues of many African countries. Put simply illicit wildlife trafficking is undermining the foundations of our development, its natural resources. In so doing it is reversing some of the hard earned economic and social achievements the continent has made in recent years.

A continental development organization like the African Development Bank cannot ignore this matter. That is why with the support of President Ali Bongo, the African Development Bank convened African Finance Ministers in Marrakesh last May to consider the implications and countermeasures. The Ministers adopted the Marrakesh Declaration and a ten point plan to combat this threat. That those Ministers responsible for economic affairs give this matter such a high priority is a demonstration of the implications of this menace to our economic development. The declaration we are adopting here today very much builds on that of Marrakesh.

Since that resolution, the Bank has provided financial support in the amount of five million dollars to the most affected countries in the Central African Region to strengthen trans-boundary management.
Going forward, we will in the next few years work with the affected African countries to put in place support mechanisms including those in favour of game park rangers who are in the first line of fire. Above all we will work with all of you here to promote socio-economic programmes in affected regions.

As the Marrakesh Declaration observed, in the long run illicit wildlife trafficking can only be effectively tackled if the demand for these products is eliminated. It is in all our interest to work together to this end. No human being needs ivory for livelihood. It is not an essential commodity. It is one of luxury if not vanity. But that is threatening livelihoods of millions across the Africa. Failure to act will have major consequences that extend far beyond environmental concerns. It will exacerbate insecurity, undermine development and threaten livelihoods of the most vulnerable.

I welcome the determination and commitment here today. You can count on the support of the African Development Bank, within the limits of its mandate, to be an active partner in this endeavour.

Thank you.