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UN-backed global conference on trade in endangered species begins



13 March 2010 – A United Nations-backed conference aimed at regulating international trade in endangered species such as elephants, polar bears, sharks and bluefin tuna kicked off today in Qatar with a warning that stronger action must be taken to protect wildlife at risk.

Some 1,500 delegates from more than 170 governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and indigenous groups are attending the triennial summit of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in the Qatari capital, Doha.

At least 42 proposals are on the agenda for discussion at the two-week gathering, with many reflecting international concern about the accelerated destruction of marine and forest ecosystems through overfishing and excessive logging, according to a press release issued by the UN Environment [Programme](#) (UNEP), which administers the secretariat of [CITES](#).

Other proposals include calls for urgent measures to tackle the illegal trade in tiger products, rhinoceroses and other species considered on the brink of extinction. Member States will decide on measures to conserve species by either consensus or a two-thirds majority vote.

Willem Wijnstekers, the Secretary-General of CITES, said increased political will is needed from member States to the Convention – which entered into force in 1975 – to deal with present-day challenges and problems.

"We do not want to risk letting down the developing world in its struggle to ensure that trade in wild fauna and flora is conducted legally and sustainably," he said.

The General Assembly declared 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity and Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of UNEP, said this year is a critical one for governments to take action to protect species.

"By ensuring that the international trade in wildlife is properly regulated, CITES can assist in conserving the planet's wild fauna and flora from over-exploitation and this contribute to the improved management of these key natural assets for sustainable development," he said.

As the conference opened today, it was announced that John Scanlon, an adviser at UNEP, will be the next Secretary-General of CITES and will take up his post in May.

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