Remarks by His Excellency,

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AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

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All Protocol Observed

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First allow me to congratulate Donald KABERUKA and the African Development Bank for taking the somewhat unusual step, in the eyes of many, of highlighting an environmental issue in this distinguished forum.

I did not hesitate when I was asked by Donald to lead the debate on Wildlife Trafficking here in Marrakech. Like him, I am convinced that this is not simply an environmental issue, even though the damage to natural capital alone is enough to justify decisive action by governments.

The various wildlife and forest crime networks are estimated to have a global value of as much as almost 27 billion US dollars per year. Today illicit trafficking of wildlife, timber and fisheries is one of the five largest illegal trade networks, along with narcotics, humans, counterfeit products and arms.

Illicit wildlife trafficking excluding fisheries and timber is worth up to US$10 billion per year.

The unreported and unregulated fisheries trade has been estimated to be as much as 9.5 billion US$ per year. The West Coast of Africa is the hardest hit region on the planet and illegal fishing boats are increasingly linked to piracy and terrorism.
The illegal timber trade may be worth up to another 7 billion US dollars annually

With rhino horn selling today at as much as 60,000 US $ and ivory up to 2,000 US $, the profits to be made are so rewarding that more and more of the illegal trade in wildlife products is run by criminal groups with broad international reach.

More and more of the profits are used to finance civil conflicts and terrorist-related activities. Furthermore, illicit wildlife trafficking is often linked to other forms of illegal trafficking and to money laundering.

Over and over again, all across Africa, we have seen poachers move into peaceful regions blessed with rich natural assets, initiating a spiral of criminality and suffering that ends in civil war.

First they kill the rhinos and the elephants – the most valuable commodities. Then they turn to other wildlife, timber and minerals. When those run out the poachers, who have grown used to making a living by the gun, become robbers, bandits, and eventually rebels.

Countries that have lost control of their natural resources almost inevitably spiral out of control.
Today wildlife crime has become a serious threat to the sovereignty and the stability of some of our countries. What has happened recently in Central African Republic is a testament to this.

Furthermore, illicit wildlife trafficking represents a risk to global health, spreading diseases both to humans and livestock; it destroys the natural assets that so many of our rural citizens depend upon in times of difficulty; and it deters investment, hindering growth of entire nations.

In the last 10 years we have lost over 76% of all surviving forest elephants in Africa. Even in my own country, Gabon, the least affected, we have lost almost 20,000 – a third of our herd – mostly to cross border poaching by heavily armed gangs.

As elsewhere, today these criminals do not hesitate to fire upon our park rangers, although to date we have been spared the significant loss of life that other countries suffer regularly.

My government is acting decisively to restore order, but we cannot solve this problem alone. This is a global problem and will require a global solution. Source and consumer countries need to work together to reduce demand as well as to restrict the supply of illicit wildlife products.
We have to act at national, regional, continental and global scales in a concerted effort. We need to strengthen our wildlife and law enforcement institutions, but we have to recognize that this is an inter-ministerial, inter-governmental issue that is no longer ‘just’ an environmental concern.

As President KIKWETE of Tanzania said to me the other day: “We are under attack”.

This is why I had no other choice than to come to Marrakech! On learning that I would be here talking about wildlife crime several of my fellow Heads of State, asked me to convey a strong message to you today.

We call upon the African Development Bank to launch a special fund for “environmental crises”. Such a fund should help us to train, equip and mobilize staff from various African wildlife and national parks services whenever there is a situation that threatens our natural or cultural heritage. It should also make provision to care for the families of wildlife rangers killed or wounded in action; and for educating children in source and demand countries about the menace that wildlife crime poses to our planet.
I look forward to hearing your views on the subject and particularly to working together to eliminate the illicit wildlife trade.

Thank you.