



Chui Court, KWS HQs
Off Lang'ata Road,
Box 3533-00506, Nrbii-Kenya
Tel: +254 20 600 977 0/1
Cel: +254 722204008
Fax: +254 20 600 976 8
Email:
Administrator@lusakaagreement.org
Web: www.lusakaagreement.org



6F International Organizations Center
Pacifico-Yokohama
1-1-1 Minato Mirai, Nishi-ku
Yokohama 220-8502, Japan
Tel: +81 45 221 2300
Fax: +81 45 221 2302
Web: www.ias.unu.edu



Hengelosestraat 99
PO Box 217
7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
Tel: +31 53 487 4444
Fax: +31 53 487 4400
Web: www.itc.nl

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PRESS RELEASE

Africa Gears up for Inauguration of the Wildlife Enforcement Monitoring System (WEMS)

The Lusaka Agreement Task Force for Co-operative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora (LATF) in Kenya, the United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) in Japan, and the Faculty of Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC) at the University of Twente in the Netherlands, through a tripartite partnership agreement, will be launching the Wildlife Enforcement Monitoring System (WEMS) in Africa. The inauguration of the system will take place on 18 July 2011 at the seat of LATF in Nairobi, Kenya, as part of a series of events leading to the African Elephant Law Enforcement Day celebrations on 20 July 2011.

The Wildlife Enforcement Monitoring System (WEMS), developed by the United Nations University (UNU), is the culmination of seven years of interdisciplinary field research involving policy makers, enforcement officials, computer scientists and civil society groups to address the challenges relating to documenting illegal wildlife exploitation and to provide a clear picture of trends regarding trans-boundary illegal wildlife trade. The main goal of WEMS in Africa is to strengthen information and reporting processes as well as analysis capabilities pertaining to the monitoring of illegal wildlife trade at both the national and regional levels. The system will also affirm the obligation of Parties to the Lusaka Agreement and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to collaborate closely in the application of the Convention as defined in the resolution on enforcement and compliance of CITES (Conf. 11.3 [Rev. CoP15]).

Mr. Bonaventure Ebyai, Director of LATF, stresses that "information sharing is a key component to combating wildlife crime in Africa. The effective implementation of WEMS in Africa will impact positively on information sharing and analysis at a global level as well as facilitate good understanding of our challenges by our partners and enhance our efficiencies in wildlife conservation". He adds, "this is an important milestone towards achieving the ultimate objective to create an information centre of wildlife crime in Africa by pooling data on illegal trade from various national agencies in the region".

The implementation of WEMS in Africa will take place in phases through the establishment of a regional environmental governance framework for research and development co-operation between LATF, UNU-IAS and ITC. The pilot implementation of the project in Africa will involve three member states to the Lusaka Agreement, namely, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. A second phase will involve all the Lusaka Agreement member states and thereafter other interested African States.

The research and development efforts aim at systematically bringing good governance and information and communication technology (ICT) enabled initiatives in managing wildlife crime information to Africa. UNU-IAS, through its Science and Technology for Sustainable Societies programme, will focus on the sustainable use of ICT by harvesting the power of cloud computing and mobile technology in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially focusing on MDG7 on environmental sustainability and MDG 8 (target 8F) on making available the benefits of new technologies to Africa, in co-operation with the private sector.

"UNU-IAS is pleased to be a partner in this important research and capacity building project in Africa using the WEMS platform in partnership with LATF and ITC Netherlands", says UNU Vice-Rector and UNU-IAS Director, Prof. Govindan Parayil. "This is amongst several initiatives that UNU is undertaking to enhance our engagement with our partners and other stakeholders in Africa".

Scientific experts at ITC will develop appropriate governance models for effective interagency sharing of wildlife crime data and for resolving the existing problems in governance on sharing and usage of information from the national to regional levels.

"Geospatial technology alone may not be a solution to the problem of transnational sharing of spatial information, especially when the information crossing borders is politically sensitive", says Tom Veldkamp, ITC Rector. "Our research on wildlife enforcement monitoring (WEMS) aims to understand the civic, scientific and bureaucratic cultures that interact when spatial information for WEMS is shared across national borders".

Preparations have reached an advanced stage with the successful completion of the regional training workshop on WEMS from 23 to 25 May 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya, organized by LATF in collaboration with the UNU and ITC, which drew participants from Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

This important milestone in the implementation of WEMS in Africa has been made possible with financial support by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), ESRI Corporation and the Parties to the Lusaka Agreement. The three parties call upon development partners and other agencies of mutual interest for support on this initiative.

For more information about this tripartite agreement or the Wildlife Enforcement Monitoring System, please contact Habiba Wato of LATF (tel: +254-(0)714-214-797; habiba@lusakaagreement.org), Makiko Arima of UNU-IAS (tel: +81-(0)45-221-2327; arima@ias.unu.edu) or Janneke Kalf of ITC (tel: +31-(0)53-4874411; kalf@itc.nl). Further information is also available on the WEMS website (<http://wems-initiative.org>).