



OUR RESOURCES OUR RIGHTS

16 November 2021

Dear Mrs. Baerbock,

Re: Urgent appeal to enable conservation and uphold human rights in Africa.

As representatives of millions of rural Africans, the majority of whom live below the poverty line, we are urgently appealing to you to uphold what you have stood for over the years: fighting for environmental protection and the well-being of all life on earth. A recent demand by your party for an effective end to trophy hunting and the wildlife trade as laid out in your manifesto (adopted by your party base in November 2020), is detrimental to biodiversity conservation and tramples upon the rights of our communities to sustainably manage and use the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend. We would like to believe that the position you have taken is as a result of misinformation being spread by [campaigns like these](#) and we would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

Further, we have learnt that your negotiators "Environment and Nature Conservation" are also discussing the topic "Import Bans on Hunting Trophies of CITES Appendage Species". As representatives of millions of rural south Africans from seven (Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania), we would like to take this opportunity to show you what effects your consideration would have on our species populations and habitat conservation in our countries. Your consideration entails loss of income, loss of jobs, loss of intact habitats, and wildlife populations; and would have the exact opposite effects that you may intend through your ban consideration. You are undermining our human rights by doing so.

Over the last few years there have been increasing calls in many European countries including Germany to ban the import of trophies from animals hunted in Africa, in the mistaken belief that this will enhance the conservation of iconic African species such as elephants and lions. Such a move will have devastating consequences for our livelihoods as well as for conservation, which is eloquently explained [in this article](#) by globally renowned conservation scientists and in this [video](#) sharing our perspective. We take this opportunity to share our viewpoints and lived realities and ensure that our voice informs decision making that affects our lives. We are tired of people from elsewhere, far removed from our realities, talking on our behalf, misrepresenting our successes and dismissing these as 'myths'.

As Africans we share with the Germans a passion and commitment to environmental protection and biodiversity conservation and similar successful approaches to conservation based on sustainable use of our resources. Conservation is a way of life for us and is deeply ingrained in our culture, traditions and rural economies and it starts with those of us who live alongside dangerous large animals. Social injustice is no stranger to us in Africa. During colonial times colonists removed our rights to manage and benefit from our wildlife, and in many instances forcefully evicted us from our lands, often to make way for protected areas. This led to dramatic loss of wildlife and habitat – a disaster for conservation, our traditions and our livelihoods.

Post-independence governments restored our rights, integrating wildlife into rural economies through inclusive conservation strategies. These provide us with socio-economic incentives to live with and sustainably manage our wildlife. Whilst it varies from country to country, 50-90% of these economic incentives come from sustainable, regulated and scientifically verified hunting. In South Africa, for example, trophy hunting annually contributes more than US\$341 million to the South African economy and supports more than 17 000 jobs. This approach has led to increasing wildlife populations and habitat expansion throughout our region, in stark contrast to elsewhere in the world where biodiversity loss and habitat destruction accelerate at disastrous rates.

The approach to conservation we adopt in Africa acknowledges the harsh reality of living with dangerous wild animals. Although many view elephants, lions and other wildlife through an idealized lens, our daily reality of living with these valued, yet dangerous, animals requires more pragmatism. We worry daily that our children may be killed on their way to school, or that our ability to provide for our families will be destroyed by elephants in our fields or predators amongst our livestock. Some facts for consideration:

- On the 6th of February 2021, a 4-year-old girl was killed in Zimbabwe by a crocodile and her 10-year-old sister escaped with serious injuries.
- In Botswana, elephants killed 36 people in 2018, injured dozens more, and destroyed the livelihoods of thousands.
- In Mozambique, wildlife killed 265 people over a 27-month period from July 2006 to September 2008.

In all our countries, similar incidents occur and escalate yearly as wildlife numbers increase. Despite this, elephants, lions and other animals live amongst us – not only in protected areas – and are multiplying because we want them to. But the harsh reality is that if incentives for us to conserve and share our land with wildlife are removed, their future in Southern Africa will be as bleak as that of large predators that were once plentiful in other parts of the world.

We appreciate that for people not familiar with the realities of rural Africa, hunting may seem a counterintuitive conservation strategy. But if the objective is conservation – not solely recognizing individual animal rights – it is necessary to understand the context of coexisting with dangerous wildlife. Consider our perspectives, evidence base, and success stories from a conservation method that recognizes the basic human right of our peoples to manage and benefit from the sustainable use of our natural resources. If we cannot feed our families through humane and sustainable use of wildlife, we will have no

option but to adopt land use practices that will destroy our beautiful natural landscapes and exterminate our treasured wild animals – an all too familiar situation throughout the world.

We welcome international interest and support for conservation in our countries. Indeed, the international community has been instrumental in our success to date through significant investment over 35 years in our Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programmes. Such support has been forthcoming from the US, the EU and multi-lateral organisations such as IUCN, UNDP and UNEP, along with conservation organisations such as WWF. It is therefore with dismay that we now hear that these same successful programmes and our human rights are under serious threat from those countries and organisations who have been our allies and supporters for decades.

We respectfully request that you hear and amplify our voices. Our conservation successes and lived realities are not ‘myths’. We extend our invitation to you, please do come visit our communities to understand the realities of living in rural Africa, and witness our conservation successes. **We trust that you will agree that our human right to sustainably manage the natural resources on which we rely for our livelihoods is not negotiable. Anything less is to put the rights of animals before the rights of African’s.**

We write this letter at a time when we trust it will have particular resonance as throughout the world there is increasing acknowledgement of the need to address past and present wrongs stemming from racism, social and environmental injustice, structural inequalities and imposition of Western values and belief systems based on privilege. **Black lives matter, everywhere.**

Signed for and on behalf of:

Botshelo Sesinyi, Manager, Okavango Community Trust, Botswana

Siyoka Simasiku, Director, NCONGO, Botswana

Dick George, Director, Maun Snake Capture, Botswana

Chifundo Dalireni , Programme Coordinator, Wildlife and Environment Society of Malawi

Malidadi Berlings Langa, Chairperson, Kasungu Wildlife Conservation for Community Development Association (KAWICCODA), Malawi

Dorothy Malesu Manga, Namibia, Sikunga Conservancy- Committee member of the Conservancy

Lorna Dax, Namibia, #Khaodi //Haos Conservancy – Conservancy Manager

Mervin //Gaseb, Tsiseb Conservancy, Namibia - Chairperson

Iyambo !Naruseb , Namibia , Otjimboyo Conservancy- Chairperson

Zak Dirkse, !Kho !Naub Conservancy Southern Namibia - Chairperson

Hilda Nakathinga, Sheya Shuushona Conservancy, North Central Regions, Namibia – Chairperson

John Bobby Itengula, Ipumbu Ya Tshilongo Conservancy, Omusati Region North Central Region, Namibia – Chairperson

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Kadima Shine, Chairperson, Mashu Conservancy, Zambezi, Namibia
Nyama Morgan, Chairperson, Wuparo Conservancy, Zambezi, Namibia
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