



GABON NATIONAL PARKS AGENCY ANNOUNCES NEW ANTI-POACHING RAPID RESPONSE CAPABILITIES AT CITES COP17 WORLD WILDLIFE CONFERENCE

Johannesburg. 29 September 2016. Gabon National Parks Agency today announced the establishment of an Anti-Poaching Rapid Response Task Force during CITES COP17 world wildlife conference, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Task Force has been established in line with the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba's unwaivering commitment to address poaching in the Central African Nation.

Parcs Gabon, the National Parks Agency of Gabon, announced that it will work with the South African-based Ichikowitz Family Foundation to capacitate the new Anti-Poaching Rapid Reaction Task Force. The Ichikowitz Family Foundation has a strong track record of conservation leadership within Africa having financed anti-poaching initiatives for over six years. Their support for Parcs Gabon includes the immediate donation of a Gazelle helicopter and pilot training, specialist ranger training and equipment for anti-poaching officers, and the establishment of a K9 training facility in Gabon to address the on-going poaching of the countries forest elephant population.

These capabilities will advance President Ali Bongo's strong and dynamic leadership in global wildlife conservation over the last seven years. President Ali Bongo and his government through Gabon Parcs, have shown extraordinary leadership in changing the way the continent approaches conservation and have lead the way in the protection of one of the world's most valuable assets, the rainforest of the Congo basin and its endangered species.

In support of President Bongo's zero tolerance policy towards poaching, Parcs Gabon will establish a special rapid reaction task force with the following objectives:

- Rapid response to poaching and trafficking situations throughout Gabon
- React to incidents in remote forrest areas
- Address trans-national poaching through effectively tracking and arresting poachers

- Combat poaching activities that are increasingly becoming more violent in nature

Professor Lee White, Director of Parcs Gabon, said: “Gabon’s natural heritage and wildlife is one of our greatest national assets and our park rangers do all they can to protect it. Poaching by organised criminal networks has become increasingly violent in the past two years and this has forced us to refine our anti-poaching strategy and how we equip our Eco-guards. Our partnership with the Ichikowitz Family Foundation has enabled us to access valuable equipment and training and our new rapid response capabilities will ensure we are even better equipped to preserve our natural heritage.”

The announcement builds on the existing philanthropic partnership between the Ichikowitz Family Foundation to train Gabon’s national park rangers to combat the illegal poaching of endangered forest elephants.

Ivor Ichikowitz, founder of the Ichikowitz Family Foundation said: “I want to commend the efforts by the the President of Gabon, Ali Bongo, and Parcs Gabon in intensifying the fight against the menace of poaching. We are privileged to be partnered with these giants of African conservation. This special conservation force will enhance the tremendous efforts already made by the Government of Gabon which is doing everything practically possible to protect the most important populations of forest elephants on the planet.”

“Gabon has worked tirelessly against the menace of poaching and we’re proud to deepen our existing partnership with the new rapid response capabilities announced today. Our experience in recent years has been that there is no better solution than well-trained boots on the ground operating closely with a fast reaction force from the air.”

John Stephenson, CEO of Stop Ivory, the Joint Secretariat to the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI), said: “Nearly 90 percent of Gabon consists of rain forest, which shelters close to a remarkable 60 percent of Africa’s remaining forest elephants – this means that Gabon has been a poaching hot spot for several years and so every effort made to protect this shrinking population is worth it.

“It is both exciting and humbling to see the support for Gabon's front line wildlife protection forces from the Ichikowitz Family Foundation. True to the EPI’s mandate, of which Gabon is a founding member, it is

support from private sector and other key stakeholders that will help reverse the rampant poaching levels that Gabon has been experiencing.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

About the the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI)

In 2014, in response to the dramatic rise of elephant poaching in the country and across Africa, Gabon together with four other African nations, launched the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI), to galvanise a crisis response that would co-ordinate an African-led, partnership based and results oriented initiative, calling for governments and private sector partners to work together to preserve and maintain the continent’s elephant populations.

The EPI now comprises 14 African Elephant Range States, all making considerable and co-ordinated strides to protect its wildlife and to put an end to the poaching crisis that has plagued the Continent.

Gabon has led the way in implementing the EPI. The government had already disposed of almost 5 tonnes of ivory in 2012, to remove it, permanently, from the reach of smugglers and to send a message to elephant poachers that illegal wildlife trafficking will not be tolerated in the Central African country. Since joining the EPI, Gabon has undertaken a full and transparent inventory of ivory gathered or seized since this disposal and has developed a comprehensive National Elephant Action Plan which is already in action - all with support from the EPI Joint-Secretariat.

About the Ichikowitz Family Foundation

The Ichikowitz Family Foundation contributes to the preservation of Africa’s heritage, the conservation of its environment, the education of its people and the promotion of nation building. The Foundation carries forward a long tradition of innovation, entrepreneurship, and community engagement to develop people through educational, environmental, and cultural activities. The philanthropic work of the Ichikowitz Family is based on intelligent giving, innovation, and capacity building with a major thrust on education and skills training.

The Ichikowitz Family Foundation’s other anti-poaching initiatives include the donation of surveillance aircraft and other military equipment to national parks, and the provision of combat training programmes to strengthen the capabilities of counter-poaching units, and the creation of one of the largest Anti-Poaching Skills and K9 Training Academy’s in Africa, based in South Africa’s Magaliesberg mountains.

The academy has been established to provide comprehensive training solutions to assist in curbing the current surge in rhino and elephant poaching. These solutions include specialised anti-poaching reaction unit training, training of handlers and detection dogs at points of access to game reserves and borders, tracking dogs for field rangers, and training special operation dogs for rapid deployment teams, among others.

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