

Oral intervention high-level debate

Organisation: Stichting Wildlife Justice Commission

Statement delivered by: Olivia Swaak-Goldman, Executive Director

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

It is an honour to address this High-Level Debate on behalf of the Wildlife Justice Commission. This General Assembly has built a clear and sustained political mandate on these crimes — through its resolutions on tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife, and most recently through the resolution on crimes that affect the environment transmitted from the CCPCJ and adopted by this Assembly. Those resolutions are unambiguous: the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) are the frameworks through which international cooperation must be delivered, and States are called upon to implement them fully.

The Wildlife Justice Commission works alongside governments and law enforcement agencies globally to disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking — including terrestrial, marine, and timber species — a major form of crimes that affect the environment.

From that operational perspective, one message is clear: these are not isolated conservation offences. They are serious, highly profitable crimes, often enabled by corruption and linked to other serious crimes, including drug and human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and financial crime. They must therefore be treated as such.

Through our work, we have seen firsthand what works. Effective responses are intelligence-led and enforcement-focused, targeting entire criminal networks across the supply chain. This includes using special investigative techniques, financial and corruption investigations, joint investigations, anti-money laundering measures, asset confiscation, international cooperation, and multi-agency coordination. Applied systematically, these tools move enforcement beyond low-level seizures and towards the networks, facilitators and beneficiaries who drive these crimes. These are precisely the tools UNTOC and UNCAC provide, yet in practice they remain underused in environmental crime cases. Closing this implementation gap is now essential.

This year presents a major opportunity under the UNTOC. Too many States still do not classify environmental offences as "serious crimes" under the UNTOC threshold — placing them outside the Convention's reach. The upcoming Thirteenth Conference of the Parties to UNTOC this October must deliver a meaningful response. We encourage States to establish an ad hoc committee with a mandate to negotiate a dedicated Protocol on crimes that affect the environment, to harmonise criminalisation, strengthen international cooperation, and enable the systematic use of UNTOC tools. Pending its entry into force, existing UNTOC provisions must be fully utilised.

Corruption remains a key enabler of these crimes, and the UNCAC is indispensable to addressing it. UNCAC Resolution 11/9, adopted by consensus last year by all 192 States Parties, contains crucial commitments to address corruption enabling environmental crimes. The priority now is implementation — and we urge States to report progress and share lessons learned through the 2027 UNCAC Working Group on the Prevention of Corruption.



Wildlife Justice
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We are proud to contribute to this agenda both through our operational support to law enforcement and through our engagement in broader civil society alliances at UNTOC and UNCAC level. We stand ready to continue sharing technical expertise, operational insights and lessons learned to help strengthen collective responses.

This is a moment to match recognition with action and to equip authorities with a coherent, effective, and truly transnational legal response.

Thank you.