

WCS Statement: High-Level Debate on Preventing Environmental Crime

8 June 2026, New York

Thank you, Mr. President.

Excellencies, Delegates:

The Wildlife Conservation Society is a global conservation organization that has worked for more than a century to protect wildlife and wild places.

Today, WCS supports conservation efforts across nearly 60 countries. Through this work, we witness the impacts of crimes that affect the environment, and the challenges of halting and preventing such crimes.

Crimes such as wildlife and waste trafficking, as well as illegal deforestation, fishing and mining, are among the fastest-growing forms of transnational organized crime. They generate billions of dollars in illicit profits each year.

These crimes harm wildlife and biodiversity, of course; however, they *also* undermine legal economies, public health, sustainable development, and human rights. These crimes threaten the integrity of ecosystems that are critical to resilience in the face of global change.

In the places where WCS works, and across all ecosystems, we see how environmental crime intersects with broader security challenges.

Criminal networks profit from the illegal exploitation of natural resources, and become entrenched in areas where state presence is limited. These crimes displace communities, and contribute to instability and irregular migration. Through the trafficking of live animals, and illegal land-use change, they can increase the risk of pathogen spillover and future outbreaks of zoonotic disease.

The world is increasingly converging on an understanding that crimes affecting the environment are not simply an environmental concern.

In 2026, however, Member States have a specific opportunity to translate this recognition into action.

For 25 years, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (or UNTOC) has provided an essential framework for international cooperation on transnational, organized crime. Parties have even developed specific protocols to stimulate action on crimes such as human and firearms trafficking. However, the application of UNTOC to crimes that affect the environment remains limited and hindered by significant legal gaps.

At the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to UNTOC this October, Member States have a historic opportunity to formally launch negotiations on a dedicated Protocol focusing on crimes that affect the environment.

Such a Protocol would strengthen the criminal justice response by enhancing international cooperation, promoting greater harmonization of national legislation, facilitating investigations and prosecutions, and ensuring that environmental crimes are treated with the seriousness they deserve.

The consequences of environmental crimes are felt across borders and will be felt across generations. Our collective response should reflect that reality.

WCS would like to express its gratitude to the Governments Brazil, France, and Peru for their leadership over the past two years in advancing these discussions, and the many Member States who have spoken today and elsewhere in support of this effort.

WCS strongly encourages *all* Member States to support the development of an additional Protocol to UNTOC on crimes that affect the environment and to engage constructively in any relevant discussions ahead.

The international community has long recognized the serious, transnational nature of wildlife trafficking and other environmental crimes. The time has come to ensure that our international legal framework reflects that reality.

Thank you, Mr. President.