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**FY24 Witness Written Statement**  
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On behalf of the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), I thank the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs for this opportunity to submit testimony. We are grateful for your continued leadership and championing support towards International Conservation.

Over 6 million square kilometers managed as Africa's protected and conserved areas provide clean air and water, flood control, disease control, climate regulation, and other life support services for the billions of Africans on the continent of all humanity. They are reservoirs of biodiversity, part of the toolkit for addressing climate change, sources of spiritual and cultural value, and a natural heritage for all.

Climate change is threatening food security, health, and well-being with related displacement and forced migration for countries hardest hit by desertification, floods, rising sea levels, and other natural disasters. The East African region, for example, has been facing the worst drought in decades, predicted to impact over 36.1 million people in the Horn of Africa alone. For Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia, this entails over USD 2.68 billion to support critical sectoral needs (water, food, and pasture) up to July 2023. All these have significant implications for arable and habitable land, and access to water, especially as the region continues to urbanize.

Diseases of high risk to humans are on the rise as globalization and an increase in unsustainable land and resource use continue to put humans into close contact with each other and wildlife. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that emerging infectious diseases are a threat to economies and lives across the globe and that the status quo of disease response is inadequate. While the spectrum of emerging diseases is large, the majority have origins in wild animals. Efforts to address the socioeconomic impacts of emerging diseases have primarily focused on mitigation after emergence rather than containing diseases closer to their source in wild animals. Conservation of wildlife and natural areas presents an opportunity to prevent the transmission of diseases from wildlife to humans at the local scale.

### **Importance of Locally Led-Conservation**

American support for balancing conservation and development on the continent is welcome and vital. However, for this support to be effective, it must be tied to African perspectives, priorities, and aspirations. Conservation characterized by isolated interventions parachuted with well-meaning but externally driven motives is insufficient and counter-productive. African conservation requires investment in solutions that address the complex realities and rapidly emerging conservation challenges facing the African continent and its leaders. Addressing these challenges requires leaders rooted in their communities, landscapes, and social and political contexts. Leaders who can develop locally relevant solutions and national movements that collectively have the potential to bring large-scale change. These leaders can be your partners.

The long-term success of balancing conservation and development on the continent can be better achieved with the continued support of partners in the U.S. who play a critical role in ensuring Africa thoughtfully conserves its wildlife and wildlands. For example, the Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC) is an African-led initiative coming at a critical juncture. APAC provides an unparalleled opportunity for the U.S. and other development partners to learn of African priorities and a continental engagement on conservation and development.

### **Supporting People-Centred Conservation**

Putting people at the center of effective and equitable conservation is a concept AWF has proven to live by through our more than 60 years of experience in conservation on the continent. This is why we recommend that U.S. support for International Conservation must uplift Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth, working in partnership with governments, civil society, and private actors to sustain the scientific and traditional knowledge, and customary approaches that will result in effective conservation and the long-term resilience of nature, culture, livelihoods, and human well-being. Over the decades, the United States support for International Conservation was critical in promoting the engagement of local communities in conservation through the development of community conservation areas in many African countries. Through support from U.S. agencies, AWF was at the forefront of establishing community conservancies in Kenya and Namibia, Wildlife Management Areas in Tanzania, wildlife ranches in Uganda, community forest reserves in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other community natural resources management programs across the continent.

### **A Holistic Integrated Landscape Approach to Conservation**

It has become increasingly apparent that conservation cannot be done without other land use activities and development goals. The failures of the fortress approach to conservation in Africa are evident reminders of the need to forge a uniquely African development model that safeguards biodiversity, secures ecosystem services, and delivers economic benefits to communities and local and national economies. United States support can help advance a holistic, integrated approach to conservation through multifaceted and well-coordinated partnerships and consortiums formed and driven by experienced entities with local trust and international influence and relationships, the capacity to attract and manage large budgets, and access to skills and technologies necessary for planning and execution.

### **Building Wildlife Economies**

Intact landscapes and thriving wildlife populations have vast potential to contribute to socioeconomic development. However, wildlife conservation is frequently seen as a cost to governments, resulting in little investment in wildlife resources despite the extensive contributions that the wildlife economy can make. Wildlife conservation does contribute to local, national, and regional economies in terms of employment and revenues, as well as in terms of livelihoods and subsistence. The wildlife economy offers the opportunity to turn conservation into a growth industry, attracting young, inspired leaders, increasing private sector investment in wildlife resources and related businesses, involving communities, and increasing their benefits and nature/wildlife becoming more abundant. Governments must see wildlife as a critical strategic asset, investing in this asset, creating an enabling environment for the wildlife economy and, therefore, resulting in the conservation of related wildlife resources.

Importantly, wildlife economies provide avenues to ensure conservation in Africa is sustainable through generating revenues for livelihoods and reinvestment into conservation programs. U.S. support is critical to stimulate the growth of wildlife economies on the continent. Five essential areas for investment are crucial to unlocking and growing wildlife economies across the continent, including - Strengthening policy, legal and regulatory provisions governing natural resources, particularly property rights over wildlife, forests, and fisheries; Improving the overall business environment to attract investment; Promoting collaborations and partnerships; Improving transparency and data collection; and Building capacity of all stakeholders to engage in, and manage, the wildlife economy.

### **Combating Wildlife Trafficking and other Nature Crimes**

U.S. Congress-directed funding to combat illegal wildlife trafficking has enabled African countries to combat poaching on the ground and the trafficking of wildlife. The U.S. support through instruments such as the Eliminate, Neutralize, and Disrupt (END) Wildlife Trafficking Act in 2016 and other measures has allowed for innovative and collaborative approaches that strengthened in-country, regional, and continental level enforcement. The removal of two

African countries, Kenya and Uganda, from the 'gang of eight' countries can be partly attributed to the support afforded by the United States. Although much has been achieved, wildlife poaching and trafficking remain challenging in Africa. It is imperative to protect and build on the gains achieved so far in combatting wildlife trafficking in Africa.

Although much has been achieved, wildlife poaching and trafficking remain challenging in Africa and cannot be addressed in isolation. Wildlife crimes are frequently associated with other nature crimes, including criminal forms of mining, logging, fishing, and land conversion. The challenge is that current efforts to combat these crimes are highly fragmented and can only bring incremental gains instead of transformative interventions. Therefore, efforts by governments and law enforcement bodies, civil society, donors, companies and financial institutions, and local communities must be coordinated and collaborative across these types of crimes. Fundamental to these efforts is continued investment in community awareness and working with communities for their buy-in in protecting wildlife resources.

### **Mainstreaming Conservation in Delivery of the US-Africa Partnership**

U.S. support for African conservation through International Conservation is critical but cannot guarantee success. Development approaches in other sectors, such as agriculture, mining, health, security, manufacturing, and industry, pose severe threats to Africa's ecosystems and wildlife. Thus, unless Africa assumes a sustainable development pathway, biodiversity loss will continue undermining our global success in addressing climate change, pandemics, and pollution, among other crises. We must acknowledge that global targets cannot be met unless Africa defines a different path than "develop now and clean up later." President Biden's efforts to reinvigorate the US-Africa partnership provide a pivotal platform to confront modern challenges, putting nature at the centre of cooperation toward economic growth, climate mitigation, adaptation, just energy transition, conflict resolution, and global health that contributes to preventing future pandemics. Conservation of Africa's natural infrastructure must be integrated into investment, trade, and development programs under the reimagined US-Africa partnership.

### **Sustainable Finance for Conservation**

Funding shortfalls are a source of the problems plaguing African protected area systems. Currently, African-protected and conserved areas receive only 10% of what is needed for effective management. Most African protected and conserved areas are under-resourced, managed on \$50 per km<sup>2</sup> rather than the \$1,000 per km<sup>2</sup> needed. A survey conducted by AWF found severe budget shortfalls among 70% of the 700 protected and conserved areas consulted, and an astonishing 9% don't have a budget at all. To reverse this trend and effectively manage all protected and conserved regions on the African continent, \$2.6-\$6.7 billion is needed annually. If this shortfall is not addressed urgently, the consequences will be dire with at least 70 percent of people depending on natural resources for their livelihoods, living in poverty.

Committing to ambitious targets such as conserving 30 % of land and 30 % of oceans under the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Africa needs to protect critical habitats and halt biodiversity loss and extinction while advancing benefits to people, economic growth, and recovery. Significant well-structured investment is required for adequate financing for protected areas and effective management to achieve these multiple objectives. The U.S. government has supported several African countries' protected areas management and advanced other effective area-based measures, such as conservancies and other community natural resource management programs. However, a more sustainable mechanism for financing Africa's natural infrastructure is more critical now than ever.

**The U.S. Foundation for International Conservation Act** has the makings to be an influential wheel in the international conservation landscape. It has long been evident that government funding is insufficient to meet global conservation challenges and opportunities. Incentivizing and challenging philanthropy to match U.S. government financing to provide long-term,

predictable funding for effective management of protected and conserved areas will be crucial in building the river of conservation financing to ensure that these strongholds of biodiversity continue to provide economic, environmental, social, and cultural benefits locally and globally. The Foundation must be built on the premise that it prioritizes projects with host-country government and local community support and that creates economic opportunities.

For this new mechanism to truly succeed in supporting the long-term conservation of critical landscapes, it mustn't perpetuate past mistakes. Firstly, the Foundation needs to advance holistic conservation approaches to ensure protected areas do not increasingly become islands isolated from other conservation areas and alienate people from nature. Secondly, resources for conservation need to reach where they are required most - the communities that live side by side with wildlife. Lastly, we can scale impact from limited resources only if we work collaboratively with stakeholders. Focusing resources on a few parks will bring gains but will not be transformative or reach the scale required.

In closing, we encourage continued robust U.S. investments in international conservation to respond to pressing and intertwined challenges – the rapid loss of nature and biodiversity on a global scale, the global climate crisis, and the threat to global health and the economy posed by the spillover and spread of zoonotic diseases that can lead to future pandemics. These challenges have roots in the loss, degradation, and over-exploitation of nature. The United States is central in helping galvanize global action, ambition, and investments to address these problems. International conservation investments are among the most straightforward and cost-effective solutions to addressing them and their threats to the United States and U.S. interests abroad. Developed countries like the United States are critical partners in this respect.