

**Statement on Vermont H.297
Before Vermont Senate Committee on
Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs**

Nir Kalron, Founder and CEO of Maisha Consulting Ltd.

My name is Nir Kalron and I am a former Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) combatant for special air operations.

I have been working in the security and defense-consulting sector over the past decade, specializing in African geo-politics and illicit trafficking of contraband. In this capacity, I have been invited to Television news programs such as BBC world, National Geographic, and NBC, and have published and mentioned in a variety of papers in leading magazines, among them The New York Times, The New Yorker, LA Times.

In 2011 I founded Maisha Consulting Ltd., which specializes in strategic anti-poaching and counter-trafficking initiatives and infrastructure.. Maisha means Life in Swahili and is our inspiration: it stands for the biblical principle that elevates the preservation of life over any other cause.

Maisha came to life through the unification of leading security experts with many years of experience in the fields of intelligence, special operations, homeland security and technology.

We closely work with the governments of over 20 African countries, NGOs and private institutions, focusing on environment security and counter trafficking of natural resources.

Wildlife crime is exploding in Africa. With record high poaching and the rapid decline in the populations of elephants, rhinos and other rare species, the tide is turning against us.

Organized crime and corrupt government officials have joined hands to meet the insatiable demand for ivory and rhino horn that is rising to the point where ivory has become a commodity worth investing in, saving in safe deposit boxes and in.

Another worrying trend is the increasing involvement of terrorist organizations and armed groups in the continent, who

use any 'bush currency' they can get their hands on to fund their bloody campaigns.

Among them:

- **Al-Shabaab** of Somalia, responsible for the deaths of thousands of its own people including the most recent attacks in Nairobi's Westgate mall and Garissa University that left scores dead;
- **Seleka** of Central African Republic (CAR), sweeping through the battered country in a pursue of control of the natural resources including the once abundant wildlife. As the Seleka advanced in their occupation of the country they invited gangs of professional poachers from the Islamic Republic of Sudan to poach large numbers of elephants and their prized ivory in exchange for support of their war efforts in guns and money;
- the **Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)** and its 25-year bloody campaign in Uganda
- the ISIS affiliated **Boko Haram**,
- the **Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)** in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and various militia groups operating in DRC –

all of which are responsible for immense atrocities and irreversible damage to our world's human and environmental security and eco system.

One might ask why this should be of concern to the Vermont Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs.

With wars and atrocities happening all over the world why is it your duty to vote in a law that deals with sales of what some consider as beautiful antiques (in the case of ivory ornaments)?

The answer resides in the first part of my statement.

We cannot ignore the fact in today's globalized world, one nation's, state's or even district's actions can have echoes thousands of miles away.

When we buy a chessboard made of ivory we encourage the making of another one, perhaps a bigger and fancier one.

When we show our neighbor the beautiful ivory sculpture of the SV Nina (I have seen huge replicas of ancient sailing vessels carved from large

fresh ivory tusks) or post its pictures on social media, we encourage production of more such sculptures and with it inevitably the killing – of more elephants - and indirectly, given the chain of finance for terror mentioned above - of human beings.

We were informed about an antique dealer's offer to provide donations to conservation from the sales of its ivory. An honorable proposal yet paradoxically a counter-productive one that would add to the demand rather than curb the supply.

A more constructive plan for such stocks – one that Maisha gladly offers to implement, is to take these ivory pieces and donate them to the wildlife agencies for dog-training purposes: one of the projects we engage in is teaching dogs to sniff and identify ivory in airports and other major crossings used by criminals to smuggle the contraband.

Albeit the geographical and cultural distance between Vermont and Africa's wildlife parks, we cannot for example disconnect the deaths of Sergeant Dismass Kimati of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) or of ranger Jean-Marie Kpionyesilani in Garamba DRC, both of which have been my trainees, from the sale of ivory chessboards in Vermont, Massachusetts or Beijing.

These men who were brutally killed in some of the world's most pristine and remote areas, died for a cause. The cause to save the world's remaining wildlife and to return some balance into the battered eco-system brought about by humankind.

As someone who has dedicated the past decade to fight environmental crime and has seen the hardships and irreversible damage done to our planet, to families of conservation heroes and to the majestic and honorable wildlife that roams our world, I herewith turn to the honorable committee members, pleading you to make a clear statement against this disastrous trend. To display the progressive and honorable nature of this great free country you represent and of the State of Vermont, by enforcing a strict and uncompromising sale of ivory.

Only such measures will dissolve this flourishing market and assist long term efforts like Maisha's and the rangers we support to suppress the killing of people and wildlife and the destruction of our eco-system.

I understand and appreciate one's right to make a living and have real empathy for those who may lose a certain percentage of their

livelihood by this law and I urge the state to support these hard working citizens and help them recover from this modest blow to their livelihood.

On a final note I would like to make a comparison of the ivory trade to the drug trade that has plagued this nation for decades. Just like it is forbidden to sell drugs due to the violent nature of the drug trade and effects on its users, their families and surroundings, I urge you to make that comparison to the wildlife killing and trafficking. The damage it brings on innocent lives and the toll on animals that have lived with humans over many millennia.

There is no moral in terrorism and wildlife crime, but their needs to be moral in the fight against terrorism and wildlife crime.

I would like to thank the Senate Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning this important issue.

Thank you also for the opportunity to lend a voice to the numerous conservation heroes we lost, and to those who risk their lives every day; and to nature's majestic and threatened creatures who have no voice.

Respectfully yours,

Nir Kalron, LLB