

AWF/Philip Muruthi Remarks

“Thank you, _____.

Africa’s rhinos are under assault. At the turn of the 20th century, there were several hundred thousand rhinos in Africa. Today, we have fewer than 25,000. In 2012 we lost nearly 700 rhinos in South Africa alone, and this year is turning out to not be much better.

Rhinos are one of the few wildlife species in Africa whose survival is not threatened by loss of habitat, but instead by illegal hunting and killing. Unprecedented demand in Asian markets, like here in China, has led criminal enterprises to illegally traffic in rhino horn at astounding rates. The Chinese public may not realize it, but the demand for rhino horn in Asia leads to one rhino in Africa being violently killed roughly every 12 hours.

But it is not just the rhinos that are suffering. Asia’s demand for rhino horn is also killing Africans. On a weekly basis, professional wildlife rangers give up their lives while protecting rhinos and other wildlife from criminal poachers; many leaving behind families.

The African Wildlife Foundation has rapidly invested in key landscapes across the African continent to protect critical rhino populations. We are funding numerous anti-poaching measures, including sniffer dogs at key rhino horn transit points, aerial surveillance technologies, rapid-response counter-poaching teams, and training and support for our dedicated wildlife rangers.

But as long as this demand for rhino horn continues in countries like China and Vietnam, and in other Asian markets, no amount of on-the-ground

effort will stop Africa's rhinos from going extinct. That's why African Wildlife Foundation is represented here today alongside our colleagues at WildAid, Save the Elephants, the Chinese government, Yao Ming, and you, members of the press—to let everyone in China know, that “when the buying stops, the killing can too.”

Just as the Chinese value their panda, Africans such as myself value their rhino. Not only is the rhino a living reminder of a species from millions of years ago, they are a destination species for the tens of thousands of tourists from around the world who visit Africa each year. People flock to see our magnificent African elephants and rhinos. But, for how much longer?

In 2011, the Western black rhino was declared extinct. It is believed that another subspecies from Central Africa, the Northern white rhino, is also extinct in the wild. We are facing the very real possibility that one day, all of Africa's rhinos will be extinct. Not only will this be a global tragedy, but it would also mean the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars across the continent. Hundreds of millions of dollars Africa's people cannot afford to lose.

There is no question the bonds between countries in Africa and China have grown ever stronger in recent decades. These bonds have brought about much-needed roads, infrastructure, and successful trade. Africans greatly value the business partnership and investment of our Chinese comrades. But today, we invite the Chinese to also be our esteemed partners in conservation and join us in this great effort to educate the Chinese public about the horrible impact buying and selling rhino horn has on us all.