Bhutan and the Tiger Conservation Coalition Commit to Catalysing US$1 billion for tigers

Tuesday 23 April, 2024

Paro, April 23 2024 – The Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference concluded today on a high note, marking a historic moment for global conservation efforts. The conference was opened yesterday by Her Majesty The Queen of Bhutan, under whose patronage this effort to mobilise greater support for protecting tigers and tiger landscapes has come to fruition.

In an address at the opening ceremony, Her Majesty spoke about the urgency of protecting tiger habitats to safeguard the wellbeing of our planet and the importance of sustainable funding to carry out this task.

Her Majesty said, "In our commitment to conservation, we must not neglect the realistic and vital need for sustainable funding. All too often, the invaluable work of conservationists is impeded by the unpredictability of financial support. Therefore, the intention of this conference is to raise significant resources through innovative financing mechanisms for tiger landscapes."

The inaugural event held in the inspiring setting of Dungkar Dzong in Pangbisa, Paro, convened tiger range countries, visionary private and public sector donors, international development agencies, the Tiger Conservation Coalition and other conservation organisations to pave the way for innovative solutions to sustainably finance tiger landscape conservation. High-level representatives from ten tiger range countries delivered statements on the progress and ambitions for conserving their tiger landscapes, including key financing challenges and opportunities. There was an address from His Royal Highness Tengku Hassanal Ibrahim Alam Shah, Crown Prince of Pahang, about his commitment to increasing protected area coverage in Malaysia.

The conference culminated with the Paro Statement by the Royal Government of Bhutan in partnership with the Tiger Conservation Coalition, inviting participants to join the shared commitment to mobilise an additional US$1 billion to conserve tigers and tiger landscapes over the next ten years. In addition to securing and increasing the global tiger population, these funds will contribute to expanding tiger range, enhancing the ecological integrity and overall biodiversity of those areas while at the same time benefiting the local communities that share space with this species.

Valerie Hickey, Global Director of Environment, Natural Resources and Blue Economy, said, "We will never have a world without poverty in a world without tigers."

His Excellency the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dasho Tshering Tobgay, said, "Tigers represent much more than endangered animals. Tigers represent the health of our forests and resilience of entire ecosystems. More importantly, tigers represent our collective well-being and that of our future. To get the work done, we need resources; we need funds. This is why this conference can be a watershed moment in the history of tigers and conservation."

The Paro Statement illustrates a dedication to implementing innovative finance solutions, fostering international and public-private collaboration, and supporting national-level initiatives that co-benefit tigers and people. This ambition was reflected in the conference proceedings, where numerous opportunities for sustainable financing that might be implemented or scaled in support of conservation efforts in tiger range countries were outlined. The UNDP presented one of these solutions in the Tiger Landscapes Investment Fund, a new blended financial mechanism under development that would catalyze nature-positive businesses with positive impacts on tigers, biodiversity, and people. In addition, the Asian Development Bank noted its intention to explore opportunities to support relevant countries with innovative financing instruments, such as a tiger bond to engage private sector investors and promote nature-based solutions and conservation.

In a closing statement, Lobzang Dorji, Director of the Department of Forests and Park Services with Bhutan's Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, expressed gratitude to all participants for their dedication to the cause and emphasised the importance of continued collaboration to achieve the ambitious goals captured in the Paro Statement.

The Conference was the first step in a ten-year collaborative process towards securing sustainable financing for the conservation of tiger landscapes.

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Quotes from the Tiger Conservation Coalition:

Richard Scobey, Executive Director of TRAFFIC, said, “The Paro Statement provides a powerful call to action to accelerate global efforts to increase tiger populations, restore the landscapes they inhabit, and support communities who live with tigers. These investments will not only secure the future for these magnificent animals but also contribute to broader global commitments for biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable development. But we will only achieve these goals if we eradicate poaching, illegal trade, and consumer demand for tigers and their parts and products. TRAFFIC is committed to supporting the ongoing work of Tiger Range Countries to bridge the gaps in law enforcement, investigations, prosecution, and consumption to safeguard tigers from poaching and illegal trade for the future."

IUCN Director General, Dr Grethel Aguilar, said, "The Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference gave us the opportunity to celebrate our progress while recognising the fragility of our success. It also raised the urgency of mobilising funds to conserve tiger habitats in living landscapes. This collective effort, guided by the ambitious vision of the Paro Statement, underlines the crucial role of partnerships and integrated approaches in safeguarding not only tigers, but also biodiversity, climate resilience and sustainable development. IUCN is committed to creating a future where tigers thrive, acting as beacons of co-existence and prosperity for both wildlife and local communities across different landscapes."

Fred Launay, President and CEO, Panthera, said, “The Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference emphasized integrating approaches to restore tiger landscapes, reverse biodiversity loss and mitigate climate change. In this endeavor, we need to remember the specific conservation needs of tigers and all the species that inhabit these landscapes. The vast expanse of potential tiger habitat empty of tigers is proof of the challenge and the opportunity. We are optimistic that the momentum created here in Paro will result in new thinking about integrated solutions and generate the significant investments needed to build nature-based economies with increasing numbers of tigers as a fundamental measure of success.”

Mohammad Younus, Resident Representative, UNDP Bhutan, said, "Tiger landscapes can be models of prosperous coexistence between communities and biodiversity. For that to happen, there’s a need for investors and donors to embrace ecological values, working closely with conservationists, communities and governments. The Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes conference has offered an incredible launchpad for such a collaboration. UNDP is extremely grateful for the opportunity to present the Tiger Landscapes Investment Fund, one of the many financing instruments being collaboratively designed to realize the $1 billion ambition, for landscape-scale conservation contributing to benefiting people and recovery of biodiversity with tiger being the umbrella species."

Joe Walston, Executive Vice President of WCS Global, said, “Tigers are recovering but this success is fragile. They remain vulnerable to poaching, illegal trade, and loss of prey and habitat. The Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference in Bhutan, with the goal of mobilizing an additional $1 billion over ten years to preserve tiger landscapes, will be key to ensuring continued success for tigers and the people and all the other wildlife that rely on these ecosystems.”

Kirsten Schuijt, Director General, WWF-International, said, "The Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference has provided a beacon of hope, inspiring collective action for biodiversity conservation at scale. WWF is extremely grateful to Bhutan for their championing of tiger conservation and is committed to jointly realising the ambitions of the Paro Statement with our partners in the Tiger Conservation Coalition."

Mary Rice, Executive Director, Environmental Investigation Agency, said, “We congratulate the Royal Government of Bhutan and Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen for hosting the Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference, marking the beginning of a global collaborative quest to secure a future for the wild tiger, the landscapes for which it is a guardian and the livelihoods of the people that live with tigers. This level of ambition is what is required if we are to heal our planet and counter the environmental crimes that destroy tiger habitat, tackle the criminal networks that profit from the trafficking of tigers for their body parts and reduce the demand for tiger skins, bones, teeth and claws. EIA is excited to be a part of this initiative with the Tiger Conservation Coalition and stands ready to support this endeavour.”

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NOTES TO EDITOR

Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference website: https://tiger-finance.org/

Tiger Range Countries present included Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nepal, Thailand, and Vietnam.

About the Tiger Conservation Coalition
The Tiger Conservation Coalition brings together leading biologists and experts in wildlife crime, human-wildlife coexistence, policy, finance, development and communications, with unprecedented alignment on achieving tiger conservation at scale. Its member organisations include the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Environmental Investigation Agency; Fauna & Flora; Natural State; Panthera; TRAFFIC; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the Wildlife Conservation Society; Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL). For more information, contact info@tigercoalition.org

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