

**My dear Colleagues from CBI, MoEF, NTCA, WCCBs. Ioana Botezatu, Asst. Director,
Environmental Crime Programme, INTERPOL
General Secretariat,
Distinguished Guests,
Eminent faculty,
Participants of this capacity building programme,**

It is indeed my pleasure to have the opportunity to be present here in the inaugural function of the Integrated Investigative Capacity Building and Operational Planning for Asian Big Cat Related Crimes for South Asia. I am extremely grateful to the officers of WCCB, NTCA, MoEF and TRAFFIC for joining hands with us in conducting this immensely useful training programme. I am also thankful to INTERPOL Environmental Crime Programme for choosing India to host this event as India happens to be home to hundreds of majestic Asian big cats. India homes nearly half the world-wide population of tigers and thus tiger remains synonymous with India. More importantly, India has four decades of noteworthy experience in Tiger conservation efforts since the days of Project Tiger. I welcome you all to India, the land of the tiger.

2.0 Admired and revered for their beauty and vitality, the five species of big cats include tigers, lions, leopards, jaguars, and snow leopards. All are endangered, mainly due to habitat loss, poaching, and dwindling populations of their prey. India is the only place in the world where both lions and tigers reside. The Tiger - Lord of the Indian Jungles, evokes royalty, majesty and power. With its position at top of the ecological pyramids, the tiger is the symbol of India's wealth of wildlife. The Harappan seals from the Indus valley civilization, dating back to 2500 BC, depict a man sitting on a tree angrily addressing a tiger waiting for him below. It symbolises our culture. The tiger is India's national animal. Tiger is also symbol of wilderness and well-being of the ecosystem. By conserving and saving tigers the entire wilderness ecosystem is conserved. It is not an exaggeration to say that saving tiger amounts to saving the ecosystem which is crucial for man's own survival. The saga of the Tiger in India follows more like a moon-waxing and waning - at times fascinating, distressing, and, more recently, a bit comforting.

3.0 India has the maximum number of tigers along with its source areas amongst the 13 tiger range countries in the world. India, with a population of 1.2 billion people, is home to about more than half of the world's Tigers. One can imagine the dimensions of human-animal conflict. Amidst a welter of pressures including the loss and fragmentation of habitat, large scale and organized poaching fostered by an ugly international demand, unregulated mining in tiger landscapes, loss of connectivity between source areas and ever increasing demand on our forests for developmental projects continue to challenge the efforts to save the tiger. Presently, the country's 1706 tigers are scattered across

a fragmented system of 43 reserves which are under the governance of seventeen different state governments. The Challenge to protect these is formidable.

4.0 The Indian government has always accorded Tiger protection top priority and Project Tiger, one of the world's most successful conservation programmes launched in 1973, has brought the species back from the brink of extinction. This unique project is unparalleled not only in the scale of implementation and but also in its coverage of the diverse habitats. In spite of its outstanding record, the Project and its strategy proved to be inadequate in the face of galloping growth of illegal trade.

5.0 In the early 90s, a poaching spree had threatened to undermine the Project. The tragic stories of complete loss of tigers in Ranthambore Tiger reserve in the year 1997 shocked the nation. When the tragedy of the tiger continued to unfold in 2005, this time in Sariska Tiger reserve, the nation was jolted into action. In fact, CBI's investigation revealed the activities of a highly organized and extensive network of poachers actively operating in Sariska during 2002 to 2005. I am happy that these case studies are being presented to the participants of this programme. Considering the urgency of the situation, Project Tiger has been converted into a statutory authority — National Tiger Conservation Authority — by providing enabling provisions in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 through an amendment in 2006. In its present dispensation as NTCA, the Project strives to streamline scientific modules of conservation and co-opt communities as responsible stakeholders. People versus animals is being replaced by people for animals and animals for people approaches to life and development. The Government of India constituted another statutory body, the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau in 2007 to complement the efforts of the state governments and other law enforcement agencies of the country. It is heartening to note that NTCA is also raising, arming and deploying of Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF). With this multi agency framework, I sincerely hope we may succeed in conserving our wildlife heritage.

6.0 India has nearly 6.5% of the world's known wildlife species, and is one of the mega diverse countries of the world. The global demand for wildlife and its products puts at risk the mega diversity of the country. The most insidious and the immediate threat to the tiger is the illegal trade in its bone and other parts of its body. Wildlife trade is now well entrenched and widespread in India. The low risk of detection, huge profits and numerous cross border trade routes has made illegal trade an increasingly attractive business. The changing market dynamics and the lifestyles make the existing regulatory regimes inadequate in dealing with the wildlife crimes assuming organized status. It calls for coordinated actions in combating the wildlife related crimes including building capacity for scientific and professional investigation along with other measures.

7.0 Illegal wildlife trading networks have cross border linkages. To effectively counter this threat we need greater coordination between the intelligence agencies and enforcement agencies transcending national boundaries. India has a Memorandum of Understanding with Nepal on controlling trans-boundary illegal trade in wildlife and conservation, apart from a protocol on tiger conservation with China and Bangladesh. The process is on for bilateral protocol with Bhutan and Myanmar. A sub-group on tiger and leopard conservation has been constituted for cooperation with the Russian Federation. A Global Tiger Forum of Tiger Range Countries has been created for addressing international issues related to tiger conservation. World Bank's Global Tiger Initiative is engaged in efforts to curtail international demand for tiger parts and other wildlife through consumer campaigns that link up the loss of the tiger to larger issues of ecological devastation and biodiversity loss. The problem of demand is one of the most daunting and complex issues facing tiger conservation. 8.0 Central Bureau of Investigation is the principal investigation agency of the nation and it has evolved into a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary law enforcement agency, its role expanding from the corruption cases to other cases viz. - cyber crimes, organized crime including wildlife crimes, narcotics, arms trafficking, arts and antiquities cases, counterfeiting of currencies etc. CBI maintains a robust incident response capability and possesses ability to adjust to emerging and evolving circumstances created by new threats. Over the years, CBI has acquired sufficient expertise in investigation of cases having inter-State and international ramifications and organized crimes. Investigations into Sariska, provided the Bureau an opportunity to bring the notorious criminals involved in organized wildlife trade to book. We are happy to be part of this noble mission of protecting the Tiger, the greatest living symbol of our natural world. 9.0 In conclusion, let me reiterate that the training programmes of this sort will help the law enforcement and conservation officers of the region to come together and forge robust and far reaching partnerships to combat illegal wildlife trafficking. It is significant that representatives of eight South Asian nations and China are taking part in this Interpol and TRAFFIC initiative. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to INTERPOL for taking measures not only to ensure Capacity Building of member countries in this highly specialized area but also to enhance coordination and cooperation and in promoting international cooperation in countering organized wildlife crime. I am confident that all the participants will find this programme a very valuable learning experience. I trust that this training will add value to our efforts in South Asia to conserve and protect the precious wildlife. I wish all the participants a pleasant stay in India.
