STATEMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE

CDE E. D. MNANGAGWA

AT

THE INAUGURAL AFRICAN UNION-UNITED
NATIONS WILDLIFE ECONOMY SUMMIT

VICTORIA FALLS

23 JUNE 2019
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government;
Honourable Ministers Responsible for Wildlife from our respective countries;
Other Honourable Ministers;
The African Union Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, Ambassador Joseph Sacko;
The Secretary General of CITES, Ms Ivonne Higuero;
The United Nations Environment Programme Deputy Executive Secretary, Ms Joyce Msuya;
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps here present;
Senior Government Officials from our various countries;
All our sponsors and partners;
Members of the media fraternity;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to Zimbabwe and especially to the Victoria Falls National
Park and World Heritage Site, one of the world’s seven natural wonders. As many of you may be aware, Victoria Falls is situated in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA) which is the home of the African elephant.

We are delighted to host this inaugural Wildlife Economy Summit; the first of its kind on the African Continent which is being held under the theme ‘Communities for Conservation, Harnessing Conservation Tourism and Supporting Governments’. This resonates with our renewed effort to ensure that our citizens benefit from the sustainable management of natural resources and wildlife.

It is my sincere hope that you have experienced the warm Zimbabwean hospitality, since your arrival. I am optimistic that our deliberations will go a long way towards the realisation of the conservation agenda of our great Continent. Thriving wildlife resources have a tremendous potential to be instrumental in sustainable
socio-economic development through associated wildlife oriented businesses such as eco-tourism, hunting and photographic safaris among other benefits. We must therefore, continue to utilise platforms such as this one, to explore innovative ways to leverage wildlife resources to grow our economies; eradicate poverty; achieve broad based empowerment, create decent jobs, especially for women and youth. It is equally important to guarantee biodiversity within our ecosystems.

**Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;**

This Summit is being held when the tourism sector in Zimbabwe is on the rebound. We are making concerted efforts to rejuvenate our tourism and hospitality industry so that it meaningfully contributes towards the attainment of our national vision to become a middle income economy by 2030.

To this end, achieving peaceful human-wildlife co-existence and sound conservation principles are a top priority to my government. The Communal Areas
Management Programme for Indigenous Resources which is a testimony of the need for more robust community-based natural resources management strategies, continue to be reinvigorated.

In addition, to encouraging community participation, my Government is promoting an integrated concept of conservancies which involves strong private sector participation. Conservancies have also become important partners in developing tourism activities and products in non-traditional tourism areas, thereby enhancing broad based empowerment.

As a result, we now have conservancies in the Save Valley, Bubye Valley and the Malilangwe Wildlife Reserve, among others. These initiatives have seen notable annual population growth of some species such as elephants, rhinos, lions and buffaloes.

**Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;**
Zimbabwe subscribes to the founding principles of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered
Species, CITES. We remain committed to the adherence of its protocols and rules. We are gravely concerned by the one-size-fits all approach, where banning of trade is creeping into the CITES decision making processes. We call upon the institution to resist the temptation of being a ‘policing institution’ and instead be a developmental one which promotes the intricate balance between conservation and sustainable utilisation of all wildlife resources.

In relation to the conservation of elephants, the Savanna elephants, which are predominantly found in Southern Africa, constitute approximately 50% of the continent’s elephant species. This bears testimony to our region’s success in championing sustainable conservation programmes. In addition, the region has the largest range area and elephant numbers which extend beyond designated wildlife areas to include communal areas. This success must be duly recognized, while our voices and concerns given due consideration.
Distinguished Delegates;

The global wildlife community is going to CITES COP 18 in Geneva, Switzerland in August this year. As a country and region, we remain guided by our principle of sustainable utilisation of wildlife. We are determined to ensure that conservation is both sustainable and beneficial to host communities.

Zimbabwe, as with other African countries pursuing in-situ wildlife conservation, requires significant funding, for the conservation agenda. Communities that are living adjacent to protected areas continue to experience unprecedented human-wildlife conflicts. They risk being maimed or killed and their crops destroyed. They must experience the value and developmental benefits of living with, and conserving wildlife.

At present, our country’s land area under protected area and wildlife production is approximately twenty-six percent of the total land size. This is an indication of the enormous value we place on wildlife.
However, the management of such expansive land area requires a significant amount of funding and investment. We welcome partners and investors to optimally manage and unlock value from our wildlife towards helping build ‘nature-based economies’. As a Government, we will continuously ensure a conducive operating environment for wildlife management and conservation.

As you are aware, Safari hunting is a vital cog in successful wildlife economies. Proceeds obtained from hunting are reinvested towards the provision of game water, fencing and law enforcement, among other conservation initiatives. We continue to call for the free trade in hunting products as these have a positive impact on the national and local economies of our countries. Currently Zimbabwe has about US$600million worth of ivory and rhino horns stocks, most of which, is from natural attrition of those animals. If we are allowed to dispose the same under agreed to parameters, the revenue derived therefrom would suffice to finance our operational conservation efforts for the next 20 years!
Going forward, Zimbabwe encourages a world that embraces the principle of a shared responsibility where natural resources are utilized in accordance with the principle of sustainability. We encourage a process where accruing benefits from natural resources are fairly and equitably shared among communities living within wildlife areas. This way, the wildlife resources add value and improve the quality of life of local communities.

Distinguished Delegates;

My Government is committed to play its part in addressing the challenge of poaching and has instituted a raft of measures to curb the scourge. These include the implementation of the SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement; Park and Species Management Plans and Policies as well as combating the use of poisons and encouraging aerial surveillance support and application of new technologies, among others. We are also strengthening
law enforcement to combat internal and cross-border wildlife crime.

As a stakeholder, we stand ready to increase our participation in other regional, continental and global conservation campaigns.

Your Excellencies; Ladies and Gentlemen;
I once again welcome you to Zimbabwe and I invite you to find some time off the busy schedule to tour the nearby majestic Victoria Falls and also visit our National Park were you will most likely encounter all the members of the big five.

With these remarks, it is now my singular honour and pleasure to officially declare the Inaugural, Africa Wildlife Economy Summit, officially opened.

I thank you.