

Hunting is not a crime, poaching is

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CIC is the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation. Our vision is a world that values and supports sustainable hunting for the benefit of people and nature. And our mission is to promote sustainable hunting to conserve wildlife and wild lands, support communities and preserve our hunting heritage.

CIC is politically independent and advocates wildlife conservation across diverse landscapes. CIC has four global initiatives. The top priority among those initiatives is the fight against wildlife crime. We support collaboration among nations. We support establishing and improving national wildlife management policy and law enforcement capacity.

The provocative title, "hunting is not a crime, poaching is", inspires to a couple of provocative comments. Most, if not all of us hunters consider this title rather ridiculous. Driving a car is obviously not a crime, but driving against red light is. Earning money is not a crime, but avoiding paying taxes by hiding revenues into a tax paradise is a serious crime, at least in my country.

Not so long ago, hunting was widely considered a basic human activity in accordance with the position of humans as part of the natural food chain. Industrialization and urbanization have led to the alienation of people from nature and hunting. This is one of the reasons why misinformation on hunting spread by the media is often undisputed by the public. Even a common language is not always in place, definitions do not exist, or if they do, they are not widely understood.

Definitions are sometimes very hard to agree upon. Even the words in the title of my intervention belong to these. Hunting has been defined in the European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity, 2007 as follows: *The pursuit and/or take of wild game species by all methods permitted by law within signatory countries. Motivations for this activity include consumption such as use of meat, hides, furs and/or trophies, and recreation, and/or management of game populations.*

But there are other terms, on which we may or may not have a definition commonly agreed upon, such as trophy hunting, commercial hunting, conservation hunting, fair-chase hunting, sport hunting and sustainable wildlife management. Allow me to refer to a work in progress by the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management, the CPW, under the lead of the International Union of Forest research Organisations, IUFRO. On World Wildlife Day this year a Glossary on Wildlife Management Terms and Definitions was launched. Let me commend IUFRO for starting such a work.

In the Glossary you can see that the CPW has defined sustainable wildlife management as follows: *The sound management of wildlife species to sustain their populations and habitat over time, taking into account the socioeconomic needs of human populations. This requires that all land-users within the wildlife habitat are aware of and consider the effects of their activities on the wildlife resources and habitat, and on other user groups.* CPW and its members' main goal is to promote sustainable wildlife management.

A short definition mentioned in the Glossary for poaching is: “The illegal shooting, trapping, or taking of game or fish from private or public property.” As to trophy hunting, let me make it clear that we discuss a **legal** activity. Like the word *hunting*, neither should *trophy hunting* be mixed with poaching. Let me quote IUCN’s briefing paper on trophy hunting: *However, trophy hunting typically takes place as a legal, regulated activity under programmes implemented by government wildlife agencies, protected area managers, indigenous and local community bodies, private landowners, or conservation/development organisations.*, trophy hunting is not causing an extinction risk for the iconic big mammals. On the contrary, in many cases trophy hunting supports the administrations and local communities in strengthening monitoring and law enforcement. How? Let me give you two examples.

In most places of the world, hunting is an important income source including for land-owners, protection authorities, professional hunters and outfitters, and related servicing infrastructure, which add value to venison. The revenue generated contributes to positive attitudes among local communities towards wildlife and conservation schemes. This results in stabilized or increasing wildlife populations. A prime example of this is the CAMPFIRE program in Zimbabwe, where rural district councils market the wildlife on their land. Many species’ populations, like elephants, have increased in CAMPFIRE areas.

The Namibian community conservancy model is another excellent example. Here, not only does the land-owning community receive the full amount of the hunting revenue, it also receives the game meat. High-value and endangered species like the black rhinoceros also strongly benefit from Namibia’s community-based hunting scheme.

Poaching

Like with forests and illegal cuttings, there are underlying causes for poaching also. Some of the socio-economic reasons are the same. What often is mostly needed is improved livelihoods and improved governance. Long term development work is usually required to achieve real improvement.

Hunters know the legislation and rules they have to obey, and the vast majority of them stick precisely to the law and also to the hunting ethics. Hunters know what, when and where to hunt. Yes, there are deviations, and you can find official data on what kind of irregularities occur e.g. in Finland in the hunting sector.

As to the topic of today, I assume we can all agree that there should be intense involvement of hunters in countering wildlife crime. *Without local communities and above all hunters monitoring what is going on at the field level there will be no success in combating illegal activities.* It is a vital interest for the hunters to protect the natural resource they value highly. In many parts of the world the hunters are members of the local communities. Hunters feel ownership for conserving and managing the wildlife resources. Hence, hunters are the first ones to participate in any anti-poaching activities.

Well-managed, sustainable hunting creates tangible economic benefits for local communities, providing an incentive for habitat conservation. Where wildlife is attributed no or little economic value, the incentive for its conservation is missing. Such a situation sometimes leads to population decline and even extinction.