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Remarks at CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species)
Discussion of Captive Breeding of Tigers

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Tiger farming has proven to be a divisive issue and one that has distracted many in the conservation community and in the Range States from the common goal of saving wild tigers in their wild habitats.

Too much faith has been placed lately upon the guidance that economics and market mechanisms can bring to this very complex issue. Economics is an extremely useful guide to policy, but as the World Bank can authoritatively say from the position of its vast professional and practical experience, a narrow economic approach has its limits and it cannot meaningfully apply to this subject.

There are clever theories that tell us that tiger farming is and could become the panacea for conservation. But there are an equal number of experts and theories who inform us otherwise. This is not surprising. There are several unknowns and even more unknowables that no amount of research can cast light upon. Will legalized farming facilitate laundering? Would it create new markets and an even higher demand for wild tiger products - for those who want a luxury good - the "real thing"? And why if farming is so effective are wild bears still poached when there is a surplus of farmed bear bile in the world? The truth is that we cannot provide answers to these counterfactuals that can only be known after the fact.

And this is why we need to exercise caution. Extinction is irreversible, so prudence and precaution suggest that the risks of legalized farming for commercial exploitation of tiger parts and derivatives are too great a gamble for the world to take. We cannot know for sure if tiger farming will work.

And if it does not work the downside risks are just too high - irreversible harm. Having carefully weighed the economic arguments we urge the CITES community to uphold the ban on wild tiger products and for all countries to continue to ban the domestic trade of tiger parts and derivatives.

We also call upon the international community at large to join efforts in providing the necessary technical and other support to the respective countries in phasing out tiger farming. This is the only safe way to ensure that wild tigers may have a future tomorrow.