

International Tiger Symposium in Kathmandu, 16–18 April 2007

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From 16–18 April 2008, the government of Nepal hosted an International Tiger Symposium, under the auspices of the Global Tiger Forum GTF and chaired by Dr S. Lieberman (WWF International). Seven sessions covered the most important topics in tiger conservation.

Experts gave general presentations on each topic that were commented on by the range country representatives and discussed in the plenary. Recommendations were submitted to the 4th General Assembly of the GTF following the symposium. GTF members in attendance were India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Vietnam, Myanmar, United Kingdom, IFAW and WWF. Observers included China, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, TRAFFIC, Save the Tiger Fund, Wildlife Conservation Society, the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group, and other international NGOs. The GTF adopted nearly all the recommendations proposed by the International Tiger Symposium earlier in the week, that pertain to habitat conservation, human-wildlife conflict, tiger trade, etc. On the trade issues, the recommendations are to: establish an information

sharing system on poaching and seizure cases; convene a workshop of tiger range countries, international NGOs, and other experts, on enforcement of tiger trade controls; and to seek clarification through diplomatic channels from China regarding its policy intentions. The final recommendation was

for the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group to convene an international workshop to develop a global tiger conservation strategy. See full report on our website: www.catsg.org.

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The dominating agenda point at the Kathmandu symposium was China's intention to reconsider the tiger parts trade ban passed in 1993. China now has some 5000 tigers in captivity, and a large amount of tiger carcasses and parts are being stockpiled. Tiger farm owners want to bring this supply on the domestic market to satisfy the demand for tiger derivatives in traditional Chinese medicine. They claim a loss of US\$ 4 billion in sales since the trade ban has been imposed. The Chinese delegation explained that tiger breeding techniques have considerably improved since the early 1990s, and that the present demand for TCM (which they had examined in a public poll) could be satisfied through the supply of bones from the tiger farms. They argued that the trade ban had not stopped poaching and illegal trade; that however a legal supply would dry out the black market and hence eliminate incentives for poaching. Several NGOs united in the International Tiger Coalition strongly opposed this assumption. They believe that legalising the use of tiger derivatives in China would boost the demand, increase poaching pressure and, as it is impossible to distinguish products from wild and captive born tigers, considerably hamper law enforcement. The Chinese delegation encouraged the tiger range states and other institutions to express their views on this. Participants at the symposium broadly appreciated the frank presentation of the case by the Chinese and their call for comments. The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group will convey its view to the Chinese authorities.