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NEWS RELEASE

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AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS PULL TOGETHER TO SAVE THE LION

Johannesburg, South Africa, January 13 2006 (IUCN) – A workshop convened by IUCN-The World Conservation Union and the Wildlife Conservation Society in Johannesburg, South Africa has concluded with consensus among the countries of Eastern and Southern Africa on the conservation and management priorities for the King of Beasts, the African Lion, *Panthera leo*.

The lion is a powerful symbol of Africa, but over the past 20 years, numbers are suspected to have dropped dramatically to a population estimated between 23,000 and 39,000 today. Across Africa, the lion has disappeared from over 80 percent of its former range. "We don't want this century to be a repeat of the last," said Ms. Kristin Nowell, a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Cat Specialist Group, who helped organize the workshop.

The African lion is classified as "Vulnerable" on the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* due to a continuing decline in the species' population. In West Africa, lions number fewer than 1,500 and meet the criteria for Regionally Endangered.

Major threats to the species include habitat loss, a subsequent decline in the lion's wild prey base, and human-lion conflict. Living with lions, with their tendency to prey on livestock, and sometimes attack people, poses hardships for many African communities. But the lion also brings economic benefits as a tourist attraction - as a focus for ecotourists, and as a species of importance to sport hunters.

The meeting concluded that, decline in the lion's wild prey base, human-lion conflicts and habitat degradation are the major causes of decline in lion populations. Regulated trophy hunting was not considered a threat, but rather viewed as a way to help alleviate human-lion conflict and generate economic benefits for poor people to build their support for lion conservation.

Emerging from the workshop is a better understanding of the current status and range of the African lion, including "Lion Conservation Units," or areas identified as being of top importance for lion conservation, and consensus on and political commitment to the management actions necessary to conserve lion populations over the next 10 years.

So what will Southern and Eastern Africa do to save the lion? Governments, biologists, and other professionals agreed to focus on: enabling policy, legal and institutional frameworks for wildlife-integrated land use; reducing human-lion conflict; preventing illegal trade in lions and lion products; improving scientifically sound

management of the lion; developing management capacity; and creating incentives to build stronger community support for lion conservation.

'Africans know how to live together with lions; they have been doing so for a very long time,' said Dr. James Murombedzi, the Director of IUCN's regional office based in Zimbabwe. Governments and experts committed to a lion conservation strategy that should strengthen the chances for co-existence between lions and people.

The Director of the Kenya Wildlife Service, Mr. Julius Kipng'etich concluded that the workshop had helped build consensus around the issues and solutions. "It helped us to understand where other people have come from - different backgrounds, different philosophies. But at the end of the day, we boiled it down to one main problem: unsustainable lion populations."

The Director concluded that the workshop provides a solid basis for bringing Africa together to conserve the lion. "The result is that lion management has a high chance of success in the future."

The workshop is linked to an earlier meeting on lions in West and Central Africa which took place in Douala, Cameroon in October of 2005. Results from the West and Central Africa workshop and this week's Southern and Eastern Africa workshop will be combined into a continental lion conservation strategy. This will help guide both national governments and the international conservation community by ensuring that investment in lion conservation is targeted most effectively.

The workshops were organized by IUCN-The World Conservation Union at the invitation of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). The initiative was generously sponsored by the UK government's Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Safari Club International Foundation, and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

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