

PRESS Release

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MOROCCO CUSTOMS OFFICERS TRAINED TO STOP ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

Governments and Non-governmental Organizations Join Hands in Effort

16 October 2009 (Rabat) – Twenty-five Moroccan Customs officers have completed a three-day training course designed to increase their capacity to detect and stop illegal wildlife trade.

The course, held in Ifrane on the 14th-16th October, was organized by the Moroccan Forestry Department (the *Haut Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la Lutte Contre la Désertification*) in cooperation with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Species Survival Network (SSN) with the participation of representatives from the CITES national Scientific Authority in Morocco.

Customs officers were trained by a senior officer with the United Kingdom Custom and Border Patrol in special techniques used to detect illegal wildlife trade. They were also trained in implementation of an international treaty about wildlife trade known as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to which Morocco is a signatory; provided information on Moroccan laws that pertain to wildlife trade; and provided useful resources to carry out their work.

The training is part of the implementation of a project entitled “*Rehabilitation of the conditions for the conservation of the Morocco Barbary macaque in the Middle Atlas region and fight against poaching and illegal trade*” which has a special focus stopping illegal trade in the endangered Barbary macaque, a species unique to Morocco and Algeria, and the only non-human primate in North Africa.

Customs officers were trained in techniques used to handle confiscated macaques and provided information on the importance of stopping the illegal trade in this vulnerable species.

This workshop is an opportunity to strengthen the future collaboration between the various partners in charge of the implementation of the Convention and consequently the control of the trade in wild fauna and flora.

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“We are very pleased about the involvement of the Customs in this process” explained Madame Mesbah from the Haut Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la Lutte Contre la Désertification. “With this training, customs officers will be able to join our national efforts to strengthen border controls to limit the illegal trade of endangered species of wild fauna and flora.”

“The customs training is one of the key activities for the protection of Barbary macaques in Morocco,” said Alessandro Badalotti, forest projects coordinator the WWF Mediterranean Programme. “We are really pleased with the training and the enthusiasm of the officers, it is now important to quickly start implementing.”

“The Species Survival Network is pleased to be working with the Haut Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la Lutte Contre la Désertification in Morocco to build national capacity for the implementation of CITES,” said Dr. Teresa Telecky, director of wildlife for Humane Society International and executive director of the SSN. “We are encouraged by the potential of the various stakeholders to work together to save natural resources and in particular, endangered species such as Barbary macaques.”

For more information please contact: alicestroud@ssn.org