

Illegal, Non-Selective and Massive Bird Trapping, Killing and Trading in Cyprus: Larnaca Declaration and Zero-Tolerance Policy

The '*Larnaca Declaration*' is the result of the '*European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds*', held in Larnaca, Cyprus, from 6 to 8 July 2011. The conference was co-organised by the Council of Europe and the Bern Convention Secretariat, and hosted by the Game Fund and Wildlife Management Service of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus, in the framework of the '*Convention on the Conservation of Wildlife and Natural Habitats*' (also known as the Bern Convention, which was signed in 1979 and ratified by the Republic of Cyprus in 1988).

The '*Larnaca Declaration*' calls on all responsible stakeholders, governments, local communities, law enforcement agencies, environmental non-governmental organisations and hunting associations to unequivocally condemn all forms of illegal taking (trapping and / or shooting) and trading of wild birds, and to adopt a policy of '*zero tolerance*' towards the illegal killing of wild birds, as well as to undertake a full and proactive role in combating this illegal activity, which represents a serious threat to biodiversity, thereby causing serious harm to the natural environment and human society.

According to the core recommendations of the '*European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds*', as submitted to and adopted by the "*31st Meeting of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention*", held in Strasbourg from 29 November to 2 December 2011, a policy of '*zero tolerance*' towards illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing includes, inter alia:

1. *The need to strengthen enforcement at each stage of the bird crime chain through appropriate targeting, scientific and technical support and cooperation;*
2. *The need to recognize the significance of the illegal taking and trade of birds, as a risk to the achievement and maintenance of a favourable status for bird populations and a damage to conservation Measures implemented by the Parties with adverse impacts on nature protection, legal hunting, agriculture and tourism sectors; and*
3. *The need to develop, finance and support national communication strategies promoting dialogue between relevant stakeholders and the wider public*".

In this context, we strongly recommend the adoption of the following measures in relation to the above three core recommendations of '*Larnaca Declaration*' and the '*European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds*':

1. The Ministry of Justice and Public Order, and the Ministry of Interior must *strengthen and reinforce the operational capacity and effectiveness of the responsible law enforcement agencies*, in particular of the Anti-Poaching Squad of the Cyprus Police and the Game Fund Regional Office in Larnaca and Famagusta Districts, where the problem of illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing exists on a massive scale;
2. The Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, and the Ministry of Interior must *provide consistent and high-profile political support for large-scale anti-poaching operations, in order to counter-balance the ill-founded arguments raised by the proponents of illegal and non-selective bird trapping and killing*, including non-registered and non-recognized "pressure groups" (most notably the so-called "Friends of Limesticks" or "Group for Reclaiming the Traditional Hunting with Limesticks"), certain representatives of the Cyprus Hunting Federation and Wildlife Conservation, and even some Members of the Republic of Cyprus Parliament (MPs) representing the Larnaca and Famagusta districts, who provide political support to bird trappers and traders;
3. The Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Ministry of Interior, the Attorney General and the Law Office of the Republic of Cyprus must *critically review the scale of penalties imposed for poaching and implement more rigidly existing national, European and international legislation*, in order to assist in eradicating this serious environmental criminal activity and ensure that environmental justice is meted out.