



**Testimony of Ian Saunders
Chief Operations Officer, The Tsavo Trust
Before the Senate Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy
July 16, 2015**

“Wildlife Poaching”

Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Markey, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify at this important hearing on wildlife poaching. I appear before you in my capacity as Chief Operations Officer and Founder of the Tsavo Trust. My family have lived and worked in Kenya and Tanzania for three generations. I have served in a various security, governance, wildlife management and sustainable development positions, including with the British Army and the United Nations in a security and counter terrorism capacity. During the 1990s I recruited, trained and managed what was at the time the largest private anti-poaching unit in Africa, which worked closely with the Tanzania Wildlife Division.

Tsavo Trust’s mission in Kenya is to secure strategic areas in the Greater Tsavo Area for the benefit of wildlife and people, through innovation, partnership and stewardship. Tsavo Trust is focused on building the capacity of communities to manage their own land, wildlife and natural resources to implement their own enterprises and to develop their own revenue, infrastructure and community governance frameworks. We call this stabilization through conservation or StabilCon.

At 16,000 square miles or twice the size of the State of Massachusetts, the iconic Tsavo landscape is Kenya’s largest and most important intact natural ecosystem.

The Greater Tsavo ecosystem is located in the southeast part of Kenya and forms part of the Tsavo-Amboseli-Chyulu Hills ecosystem. Tsavo hosts Kenya's largest elephant population and its Chyulu Hills catchment area feeds Mombasa, Kenya's second city, with fresh water. It is estimated there are approximately 12,000 elephants in the Greater Tsavo Ecosystem – the largest population in Kenya. Over the past ten years, populations of elephants have dropped by 50 percent in Africa, primarily due to wildlife poaching.

Tsavo occupies a strategically pivotal space between the important coastal belt and the interior of Kenya. It lies at a crossroads of cultures, religions and perspectives. Importantly, the Tsavo region is a potential security buffer against destabilizing forces seeking to infiltrate deeper into East Africa through Kenya's coastal entry points and from Somalia. But this critical landscape is now at risk from complex interrelated threats including wildlife trafficking, human-wildlife conflict, small arms proliferation, human poverty, biodiversity loss, transboundary organized crime and violent extremism.

Poaching and the challenges faced by communities in the Tsavo region

Poaching of wildlife has evolved into an illegal, organized commercial business, increasingly controlled by trans-national criminal gangs that exploit the poverty and desperation of rural people. These organized criminal networks deal not only in illegal wildlife products like ivory and rhino horn, but also in other contraband such as drugs and illegal weapons.

Poaching in regions like Tsavo not only destroys a valuable economic resource and threaten the safety of people (for example, through the proliferation of illegal firearms and organized crime), it also destabilizes the natural environment. The commercialization of the bushmeat trade (the killing of wild animals for food) and the exotic trade in animal parts such as pangolin scales and lion bones are having a devastating impact on multiple species from small antelope to large predators and other megafauna.

The poaching and wildlife trafficking threat presents a complex law enforcement and social challenge. Much of the illegal activity occurs in remote and expansive rural areas where wildlife and humans co-exist and outside the Kenya Wildlife Service managed National Parks. Most rural people in Tsavo view wildlife as a threat to their lives and livelihoods, or as competition for resources (grazing, land, water). They see few direct or even indirect benefits from wildlife, and in the absence of other income opportunities will resort to poaching on behalf of others as a form of employment.

Wildlife conservation for its own sake is a new concept to most of Tsavo's rural inhabitants, in which they currently see little value. Conservation is viewed primarily as a foreign indulgence.

In seeking solutions, I believe the term "wildlife management" is a misnomer. To conserve wildlife and other natural resources, we need to first and foremost manage ourselves, and mitigate the negative impact of our own human activities. Wildlife will prosper and natural resources will bring more equitable, more sustainable benefits, if we—as the dominant species—can provide a conducive environment.

Kenya is developing at a fast rate. With the undeniable benefits of development also come many challenges, some of which, such as internal security, are shared with the United States and other countries. Kenya's human population is increasing, new and essential infrastructure is appearing in remote rural areas, new centers of human settlement are increasing the demands on ecosystem services.

In Kenya as elsewhere across the world, the exposure to widely accessible modern communications and new media has given impoverished rural people a wider perspective and created new expectations, in some cases far beyond what is realistically achievable. In some areas, this has resulted in resentment, dissent, despondency and anger: an ideal environment for exploitation by extremist or organized illegal entities.

Tsavo Trust's Approach – Stabilization through Conservation

In response to the complex and multifarious challenges faced by the Tsavo ecosystem, Tsavo Trust is implementing its *Stabilization Through Conservation* (StabilCon) approach, which is a holistic strategy to securing both human and wildlife populations against the various threats currently facing this strategically and ecologically important region and its people.

StabilCon rests on the premise that sustainable development and the management of natural resources, including wildlife, can only succeed in a stable environment; conversely, prudent management of natural resources can be used as a catalyst for creating that stability.

StabilCon utilizes conservation infrastructure not only to protect wildlife but also to help stabilize the human terrain, thereby supporting the national security effort and giving wildlife and the natural environment a much greater value than tourism dollars alone. It provides a holistic, culturally aware and nature-based approach to undermining the spread of organized crime, reduce illegal wildlife trafficking, it helps curb radicalization through strengthening rural economies and protecting biodiversity while populating vulnerable areas with robust community governance systems.

Today, many of the world's remaining natural environments are subject to physical, economic, environmental or structural insecurity. In Tsavo, rural communities are the most important actors in countering wildlife crime and other illegal activities at source, but they will only have the ability and resolve to act against these destructive influences if they have the opportunity to prosper themselves and have realistic prospects for the future. The StabilCon approach comprises four interrelated goals:

- (1) **Reduce physical insecurity** for people, wildlife and natural resources to a manageable level as a mandatory first step;

- (2) Use the resulting physical security as the foundation on which to **build and diversify nature-based economic opportunities** and access the social services enabled by greater prosperity;
- (3) **Strengthen environmental security** so that the benefits of a healthy environment, which underpins all life, can be shared between this generation and those that follow; and
- (4) Build more **robust, equitable and representative community governance systems**.

By securing at risk areas via non-aggressive, low-intensity engagement, respecting traditional livelihoods while delivering essential needs, StabilCon is a strategy, which can bring stability to vulnerable regions from the “inside-out” rather than adopting a more interventionist “outside-in” approach. StabilCon has the potential to ‘inhabit the space’ currently open to exploitation by destabilizing forces.

StabilCon does not seek to impose ownership or control over communities implementing the strategy; rather it provides a grounded approach which, when adopted by rural people, gives them the ‘tools’ and technical capacity needed to address their own livelihood priorities in a sustainable way.

StabilCon is working alongside Tsavo’s rural communities, the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA), Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), national government law enforcement agencies, local and international academic institutions and other partners delivering on-the-ground development and conservation projects.

Tsavo Trust’s remains committed to creating a unified best practice framework for potential adoption at the national level, both in Kenya and elsewhere.

Approach can be applied to other areas affected by poaching

While Tsavo Trust is implementing StabilCon in southern Kenya, this strategy is readily exportable not only to other countries in Africa but also to other parts of the

world where marginalised rural communities inhabit vulnerable, natural resource-rich environments. The StabilCon model is being exported to Northeast India where similar dynamics are at play and where poaching of elephants and rhino fuel instability and create conflict with local people. Other areas of Central Asia and Africa could benefit from the approach such as conflict hotspots and natural resource rich Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Southern Sudan or even Afghanistan.

Any structured organization working in the rural space can implement the StabilCon approach, including commercial businesses, faith based institutions, local or national governments, community groups, NGOs or civil-military partnerships.

In particular, Tsavo Trust believes that StabilCon, can play a key role in contributing to the on-going success of Community Conservancies in Kenya, particularly in currently underrepresented rural areas. Community Conservancies are essentially nature reserves, owned and holistically managed by local rural communities with support from stewardship organizations when required. The areas are zoned to allow a range of sustainable and complementary land uses, such as cattle ranching. Conservancies have already proved successful in Mongolia, Namibia and Kenya, based on initial concepts developed here in the United States.

The United States government has provided a significant boost to Kenya's community-led conservation and development projects with the goal of creating a more stable environment, with more productive, more resilient rural communities contributing positively to Kenya's national effort.

Ultimately, StabilCon puts conservation of wildlife and natural resources agendas higher priorities for people and rural communities, and serve as a catalyst for enhanced peace and stability.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss this important issue. I look forward to answering any questions committee members may have.