

White Rhino Return to Garamba National Park

KINSHASA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, June 12, 2023

/EINPresswire.com/ -- Sixteen southern white rhino have been safely translocated to Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This subspecies' introduction to the Garamba Complex (GC) gives hope that it will adapt and fulfil the same role as the now extinct northern white rhino.

In a ground-breaking effort to restore the ecological balance of one of Africa's oldest national parks, 16 southern white rhino have been introduced to Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), from &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve in South Africa. The translocation was achieved through a collaboration with the Institut

Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), African Parks and &Beyond, and was sponsored by the Barrick Gold Corporation who have undertaken to support the project over the next few years.

This translocation forms part of a larger conservation initiative within the Garamba Complex (GC) to restore the full richness of the megaherbivore complement in the park after the last northern white rhino was poached in 2006 and has since become functionally extinct as a sub-species. Introducing southern white rhino to this area will enhance Garamba National Park's contribution to the wildlife economy of the DRC, ensuring that the conservation of the country's outstanding natural landscapes generates long-term benefits for local communities and all Congolese.

"The return of white rhinos to the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a testament to our country's commitment to biodiversity conservation. As Garamba is poised to become a globally important sanctuary for megaherbivores, introducing southern white rhino to the country is an



A tranquilised rhino is gently walked by experts to a crate © Mike Dexter

important step in advancing our contribution to rhino conservation in Africa. We are grateful to our conservation partners, who play a significant role in supporting us in fulfilling our objectives and promoting sustainable, transformational, and equitable socio-economic growth," said the Director General of ICCN, Mr Milan Ngangay Yves.

The 16 rhino were sourced from &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve in Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), South Africa, within the Mun-Ya-Wana Conservancy. The rhino were airlifted in two moves from South Africa to Barrick's Kibali Mine airstrip in north eastern DRC and then trucked to Garamba National Park. This reintroduction forms part of the overall strategy to promote the long-term conservation of white rhinos in Africa by extending their range and creating new breeding nodes for the species in secure areas. Professional staff and a qualified veterinarian will oversee the rhinos' acclimatisation in Garamba.

African Parks' CEO, Peter Fearnhead, said, "Efforts to save the northern white rhino was a case of 'too little too late' and should never be allowed to happen again. Now that Garamba is a safe location and has proper protection in place, this reintroduction is the start of a process whereby southern white rhino as the closest genetic alternative can fulfil the role of the northern white rhino in the landscape. We are thankful to our partners for making this translocation possible: The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for their visionary conservation leadership, the local communities for their support and eagerness to protect this iconic species, Barrick Gold Corporation for funding the project and their technical support in executing it, and &Beyond for providing the founder population of rhinos."

Initially considered extinct in the late 19th century, a small population of fewer than a hundred southern white rhino was discovered in KwaZulu Natal in 1895. Through dedicated conservation efforts spanning a century, the population has grown significantly, reaching between 19,600 and 21,000 individuals residing in protected areas and private game reserves, predominantly within South Africa. Today they are classified on the IUCN Red List as Near Threatened. However, recent years have seen a renewed decline in the white rhino population because of poaching with the current population estimated at over 15,000 animals. The proactive move to Garamba aims to repopulate areas where rhinos have become locally extinct and establish healthy populations in secure locations. This strategic endeavour holds promise for the species' long-term viability in the DRC.

Dale Wepener, &Beyond South Africa Conservation Manager, said, "Conservation translocations have been proven to be a critical tool in securing the survival of endangered species, such as the rhino. As &Beyond, our long-term vision is protecting black and white rhino. Creating new habitats and ranges is something that &Beyond has been doing for a while, especially through our history of moving rhino from Phinda to other parts of Southern Africa. We believe that this latest conservation translocation and introduction is a way of protecting the species by creating a new, safe and secure habitat for the species."

President and CEO of Barrick Gold Corporation Mark Bristow, said, "Sponsorship of this

translocation stems from our 10-year partnership with African Parks and investment in the conservation of Garamba National Park. Biodiversity underpins many ecosystem services on which our mines and their surrounding communities depend. Being able to play a role in protecting biodiversity and preventing nature loss is central to what we do. We aim to continue working with our partners in the drive to achieve economic, socio-political and ecological sustainability.”

Additional rhino will be translocated to Garamba National Park over the next few years to create a viable breeding population.

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Notes to editors:

The successful completion of this crucial translocation was made possible through the generous support of Barrick Gold Corporation. Their leadership gift provided not only the necessary funding for this project, but also valuable technical expertise and resources that were instrumental in its success.

The sustained operations and infrastructure of Garamba National Park has been made possible by the support of several philanthropic funders including: The European Union, USAID, US DoS INL, US Fish and Wildlife Services, the Elephant Crisis Fund, and the Wildcat Foundation who have generously funded the park's activities for many years, providing crucial financial assistance for the successful protection and conservation of this important wildlife habitat.

About Institute Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) of the Democratic Republic of the Congo: The ICCN is a public entity housed under the Ministry of Environment and is charged with the sustainable management of biodiversity in protected areas in the DRC in cooperation with local communities and other partners. ICCN manages a natural and cultural heritage made up of nine national parks and a constellation of 80 reserves covering over 13% of the country's area. African Parks began work with the ICCN in Garamba National Park in 2005. ICCN is currently under the leadership of Director General Yves Milan Ngangay.

About Garamba National Park: Garamba National Park is situated in the north-eastern corner of the DRC and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (1984). Previously known as an “elephant reserve”, the park was established in 1936 to conserve the high numbers of large mammal populations in the area. But over the decades, Garamba endured periods of armed conflict, rampant ivory poaching, and civil wars, which led to steep declines in wildlife populations and threatened its UNESCO listing. In 2005, the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) entered into a management agreement with African Parks for Garamba. Between 2005 and 2016 widespread insecurity due to the rebel group, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and other

armed forces continued to threaten the safety of communities and wildlife. In 2016, African Parks, together with the ICCN, revised its approach by implementing new systems to overhaul conservation law enforcement and bring stability to the park and its surrounds. As a result, wildlife numbers in the park are increasing, while communities are realising the benefits from stability in the region.

About African Parks: African Parks is a non-profit conservation organisation that takes on responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of national parks in partnership with governments and local communities. African Parks manages 22 national parks and protected areas in 12 countries covering over 20 million hectares in Angola, Benin, Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, the Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Rwanda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

About Barrick Gold Cooperation: Barrick is a sector-leading gold and copper producer, operating mines and projects in 19 countries across four continents. Our portfolio spans the world's most prolific gold and copper districts and is focused on high-margin, long-life assets. Our highly diversified workforce is drawn almost entirely from our host nations and equipped with world-class skills. At Barrick, we understand the importance of protecting and restoring our planet, and through our partnership with African Parks proudly support the conservation and reintroduction of biodiversity in the Garamba National Park and the increased population trends of elephant, Kordofan giraffe and buffalo.

About &Beyond: &Beyond designs personalised high-end tours in 13 countries in Africa, five in Asia and four in South America, offering discerning travellers a rare and exclusive experience of the world as it should be. We own and operate 29 extraordinary lodges and camps in iconic safari, scenic and island destinations in Africa and South America. This enables us to positively impact more than 9 million acres of wildlife land and 3 000 kilometres of coastline. Established in 1991, &Beyond strives to leave our world a better place than we found it through our care of the land, wildlife and people and the delivery of extraordinary guest experiences.

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