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FIGHT FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS

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When you buy a puppy from a pet store, do you ever wonder where did the pet shop owner get it from? When you see a fur coat hanging on display at a store, do you realise how much pain the animal must have suffered? Mervin Fernandes, WWF – India Secretariat, brought up these thought-provoking questions and several others at the ongoing Kirloskar Vasundhara International Film Festival (taking place in the city till February 11) and spoke about the illegal wildlife trade in our country.

With rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, there has been massive wildlife habitat loss, so how do we find a balance between man and nature? Fernandes says, "We must be really pragmatic of creating certain areas which are very critical or no-go areas. The question is how much can we develop and is there really a need for all the industries and for them to expand? How many more industries do we need to meet the growing demands?"

FIND ALTERNATIVES

Earlier, humans engaged in hunting for food and later the royalty took part in hunting adventures which was considered as an act of courage. Now it has turned into a commercial exercise.

Discussing the reasons behind the rise in hunting in the modern era, Fer-

nandes says, "People initially would hunt for pride which has somewhat stopped. There are a few communities which are still dependent on hunting primarily because of the protein need requirement but that can be supplemented by other means. Presently, the trade is very lucrative because of the international market. So we need some solutions about how we can work with local poaching communities because they get paid very little considering the price that animal body parts and skin fetches in the international market. We need to get these communities into supplementary livelihood activities and pull them away from the trade."

The fashion industry is also infa-

mous for the use of animal skin to make certain products. So can they be blamed as well for cruelty against animals?

"To a certain extent, yes. There is a demand in the market from these industries but there can always be a solution to these issues. You can always turn to creating artificial belts and bags. There is no need to use animal skin or fur to make these items. We need to have a posi-



Mervin Fernandes, WWF – India Secretariat, brings our attention to illegal animal trade and why we must raise a united voice and come together as a nation to curb the practice



Mervin Fernandes

tive dialogue with these industries to bring in change," says Fernandes.

A lot of fashion brands have shifted to artificial raw material for their designs. The condition was much worse in the '80s. But more people need to join in the effort.

EDUCATE THE KIDS

Since education plays an important role when it comes to creating awareness towards any issue, Fernandes suggests that animal rights' campaigns must start in schools.

Fernandes shares, "I think there is quite a lot of education being provided to children about animal trade but we never holistically looked into illegal wildlife trade. Children are capable of making a conscious decision, so if we teach them early in life about how the consumption of these animals can be avoided, then it may make a difference. We can teach them about the legal and illegal practices, and how species are becoming endangered and extinct, wildlife habitats

are diminishing in size and so on."

He also feels that even though our laws are quite strict we still need to improve the way they are implemented and add a few points to them. "For example, the laws of the wildlife sector are terrestrial focused. There are hardly any laws with respect to marine or plant life. If laws are made regarding the safeguarding of these species, it will be beneficial."

Fernandes also appeals that as concerned citizens of the country we need to be aware of these things and complain and also raise a voice so that enforcement agencies can take action against illegal aspects of the trade.

He says, "Be more responsible about what your selection process is, for example, if you see a crocodile skin bag, it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to buy it. We don't even know if that person has the authorised papers to sell an animal skin bag in the first place. We just need to act a bit more responsibly as citizens."

Every living thing on this planet deserve rights, so why deny?