

**Forum:** Advisory Panel (UNODC)

**Issue:** Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime

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## Introduction

Currently, wildlife and forest crimes are one of the largest transnational organized crimes around the world, generating around 19 billion per year and threatening conservation efforts of species and forests. Wildlife and forest crimes consist of mostly illegal trafficking and poaching, which is hard to control and monitor due to the lack of strong regulations. Furthermore, because most wildlife crimes take place in developing or newly developed nations in regions like Africa, governments in the area are mostly unable to tackle this issue.

Wildlife and forest crimes frequently converge with other crimes such as corruption within governments and documenting frauds, which are even harder to monitor and detect. While NGOs and IGOs have made great progress in protecting hunted species, like the Sumatran tigers and African elephants, corruption of regional governments allow wildlife crimes to continue. Without actions to prevent these criminals, not only are habitats being destroyed, critical species will be endangered and pushed to extinction.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Wildlife Crime

Wildlife Crime consists of any illegal activities involving fauna and flora, which are animals and plants respectively. Illegal activities include exploitation of wildlife resources, illegal hunting, and illegal trading of wildlife products.

### Forest Crime

Criminal activities in the forestry sector that covers all sectors of the industry, from harvesting to the selling of products. Forestry crime also refers to the offenses that facilitate such activities, such as corruption, money laundering, and document frauds.

### Deforestation

Clearing or thinning of forests by humans, which can both be caused intentionally, such as logging, and unintentionally, such as wildfires.

### **Illegal Logging**

The harvest, transportation, purchase, or sale of timber that violates laws. Examples include using corrupt means to gain access to land, extraction of timber without permission, and cutting of protected species.

### **Poaching**

Illegal hunting, killing, or capturing of wildlife that violates local or international conservation laws.

### **Trafficking**

Illegal transportation of goods, in this case, species and their parts, timber, and other wildlife resources, for profit.

## **Background Information**

### **Illegal Hunting**

Illegal hunting has always been a common wildlife crime. The lack of recognition of endangered species pushed many species to near extinction. Illegal hunting mostly consists of elephant poaching and the illegal hunting of tigers.

#### ***Elephant Poaching***

2,500 elephants were hunted and their ivory tusks removed in 2011 alone, according to TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade monitoring network. Elephant poaching is most prominent in Africa, where there are lax of law enforcement and regulations to protect wild elephants from hunters. Although African species conservation have improved greatly after African nations gained independence, rise of terrorist groups in the last decade caused a surge in illegal poaching of elephants. Although elephant poaching occurs in almost every country in Africa, the markets for the purchasing and selling of elephant parts are in more developed African nations such as Egypt and South Africa.

#### ***Illegal Hunting of Tigers***

Roughly 3,000 tigers remain in the wild after a decade of hunting by illegal groups. One of the most endangered species is the Sumatran Tigers, which, under heavy deforestation and

rampant hunting by humans in the last decades, decreased to less than 400 surviving in small forest patches in the island of Sumatra. Similar to elephants, tigers are mostly hunted in less developed nations of Africa. Especially in Africa, corruption and lack of law enforcement prevent efforts reducing poaching and selling of these species. Despite increased international efforts, the black market with networks around the world for tiger parts remains strong.

## Illegal Logging

Illegal logging of timber is another widespread wildlife crime that is the lead cause of deforestation and degradation of forests. Illegal logging often refers to not abiding to forest conservation laws, logging more than the designated maximum amount of trees, and illegally trading timber. Illegal logging impacts wildlife greatly and can also lead to endangerment of species.

## Role of Corruption in Wildlife Crimes

Many works of NGOs showed a strong link between wildlife crimes and trafficking, and corruption within governments. For example, the UK NGO Environmental Investigation Agency concluded that although corruption is not the driver of wildlife crimes, poor governance and corruption facilitate its increase and existence. Especially in developing countries, many officers and leaders take bribes to provide documents or safe passage for trafficking and hunting of endangered species. For example, for the last two decades, Latin American border officials have been bribed by traffickers to document their products as illegal and not required to be inspected when travelling.

## Results of Wildlife Crimes

Most of those who participated in wildlife crimes remained free due to lack of law enforcement. As conservation efforts increased, countries like China and the United States increased penalties and enforcements on conservation laws. For example, in 2010, eight Chinese citizens sent to jail in China for smuggling elephant ivories into the country. Not only do wildlife crimes impact those who participate in it, they pose a great threat to the hunted species and the environment. In the last decade, hunting of Western Black Rhinoceros and Sumatran Tigers sent both species to near extinction, which will also impact the environment by changing the balance of the food chains. Many reports of NGOs and governmental agencies also showed detrimental impacts if wildlife crimes continue. For example, the Environmental Investigation Agency reported that not only will wildlife crimes reduce state revenues of developing countries, some of the revenues traffickers and criminals obtain through trafficking wildlife will help fund terrorist groups.

## Transnational Aspects of Wildlife Crimes

Similar to most crimes such as drugs trafficking, wildlife crimes are mostly transnational, as wildlife of one part of the world is in high demand in another. Throughout history, more populated and

less law enforced countries such as Uganda were the main transits for illegal trafficking of animal parts such as elephant ivories, tiger teeth, and endangered animals' leather. The lack of border security and inspections allow many illegal cross-border traders to easily transport these items between countries. The lack of law enforcements tracking down crime organizations allow strong communication between members of countries and their middlemen, avoiding the notice of authorities. As a result, everyday 1,000 kilograms of illegal animal and wildlife parts are exported from Africa to countries around the world.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### China

The People's Republic of China is one of the main importers of many illegal wildlife products from ivories to tiger flesh due to popular perception of "medicinal properties" within the organisms' parts. The landmass and abundance of rural areas in China allow illegal hunters and traffickers to create backpasses and routes for them to escape law enforcements.

### United States

With a large market for exquisite products such as ivories and tiger teeth, the United States also have an abundance of wildlife crimes and illegal activities. Although the contry have made great efforts to limit the trafficking of animal parts into and out of the country, the market remain strong as some of the organizations responsible have the resources to escape law enforcements. Also, the United States is the leading importer, exporter, and user of timber, creating a large market for industries to increase profit through purchasing cheap illegal timber.

### India

With an abundance of wildlife, India is both a big producer and consumer of illegal wildlife products. Due to mostly internal illegal activities, border control is not efficient in stopping wildlife crimes in India. Despite strict laws by the government, India's wildlife crime rate have not decreased greatly due to lack of enforcement and funds for protecting endangered species.

### South Africa

South Africa is a major supplier of many popular illegal wildlife products such as ivories and rhinoceros horns. South Africa was known of corruption within the government that allows wilflife crimes to continue. Similar to many other nations, South Africa have began working internationally to increase punishment and law enforcement to lower illegal trafficking.

## International Union for the Conservation of Nature

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature is a membership union established on October 5, 1948. As one of the largest environmental network and panel, the IUCN cooperates with IGOs, NGOs, and companies of the private sector dedicated to preserve the environment and its species. The IUCN has a Red List that is revised every 5 years that classifies every species into different level of endangerment that helps organizations prioritize efforts toward protecting them from traffickers and hunters.

## World Wildlife Fund

The World Wildlife Fund is one of the major NGOs devoted to environmental conservation in many countries. It currently hold offices in more than 100 countries. As an NGO, the WWF has little influence over controlling and containing wildlife crimes, but it is popular among citizens of many countries and helped spreading awareness towards the rising issue of wildlife and forest crimes.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
October 5, 1948	International Union for the Conservation of Nature was founded and began gathering data and launching projects toward conserving endangered species
April 29, 1961	The World Wildlife Fund was established in Switzerland that works toward reducing amount of species endangered and human impacts on the environment
October 28, 1982	The United Nations passed the World Charter for Nature which introduced a code of conduct for protecting and preserving natural habitats and resources
December 20, 2013	The United Nations officially name March 3rd of every year as the World Wildlife Day with Resolution 68/205 that will raise awareness to the world's wildlife and attention to the decline of endangered species population due to illegal poaching and trading of wildlife
July 30, 2015	The United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 69/314 on Tackling

## Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife

### Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- UN World Charter for Nature (**A/RES/37/7**)
- UN Resolution on Tackling Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife (**A/RES/69/314**)

### Possible Solutions

Throughout the years, the United Nations and individual countries introduced solutions to tackle wildlife crimes, such as strengthening policies and regulations regarding conservation efforts and the cutting of trees. However, these solutions have not led to much improvement as corruption within countries' governments prevent policies from being implemented. Possible solutions toward reducing these crimes are **spreading awareness** regarding nature and the importance of protecting these species to reduce demand and **promoting cooperation** in and between nations to detect criminal activities such as international trafficking. Ways to increase cooperation and conversations between countries include annual conferences devoted to combating wildlife crimes, development of a specialized committee aligned with the United Nations devoted to solving wildlife and forest problems. For countries with little to no definition and punishments for wildlife and forest crimes, it will be helpful to **reform legislations** of these countries to state these crimes as serious and ensure punishments to the criminals, which can discourage more people to continue. Lastly, to ensure that these solutions will be applied, experts should provide solutions toward **reducing corruption** within governments through ways such as working with Transparency International.

Since direct intervention is not a viable option for the United Nations nor its allies, **funding or support for NGOs or trust organizations** in critical regions dedicated to conserve and protect wildlife is also a solution worth mentioning. NGOs and trust organizations such as the African Wildlife Conservation Fund and the Tusk Trust have made great strides toward protecting wildlife against illegal poachers.

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