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Powerful alliance to fight wildlife crime comes into effect

Saint Petersburg/Geneva/Lyon/Vienna/Washington D.C./Brussels, 23 November 2010 - While the majority of the discussions at the International Tiger Forum in Saint Petersburg this week are understandably on tiger's habitats and ecosystems, the heads of five major international agencies have met to seal a powerful alliance to fight wildlife crime effectively and discuss collective actions to stop the key drivers that are bringing the largest of the wild cats to the brink of extinction: poaching, smuggling and illegal trade.

The Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Secretary-General of ICPO-INTERPOL, the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the President of the World Bank and the Secretary-General of the World Customs Organization (WCO) have signed a Letter of Understanding that brings into effect today the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC).

Commenting on the creation of the consortium in this, the UN International Year of Biodiversity, the CITES Secretary-General, Mr Scanlon, said: "ICWC sends a very clear message that a new era of wildlife law enforcement is upon us, one where wildlife criminals will face a determined and coordinated opposition, rather than the current situation where the risks of detection and of facing penalties that match their crimes are often low. Poaching and illegal trade have brought wild tigers close to the point of no return. Only if we work together, can we ensure that tigers will survive. Our children should inherit the privilege of looking at tigers in the wild and not only behind bars in a zoo. Instead, it is those criminals who poach and smuggle tigers that should be the ones behind bars," he added.

"The threat of wildlife and environmental crime is one which is taken very seriously by INTERPOL as demonstrated by the recent unanimous vote by our General Assembly in support of greater global policing efforts in these areas," said INTERPOL Secretary General Ronald K. Noble. "Environmental crime is global theft and as the world's largest police organization INTERPOL is committed, with the support of each of our 188 member countries, to build on the work already being done in protecting our planet for future generations."

"The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has asked me to convey his strong support of this timely Forum. He welcomes this initiative and expects it to achieve tangible results," said Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Yury Fedotov. "Wildlife crime frequently involves money laundering, fraud, counterfeiting and violence, and in some cases it may have links to terrorist activities or insurgencies. Ending wildlife crime against tigers and other endangered species, particularly transnational trafficking, requires a coordinated global response. At the national level, we need to strengthen law enforcement capacity to deal with this and environmental crime more broadly. Internationally, we must encourage and develop a culture of cooperation and criminal intelligence sharing to stop transnational trafficking in endangered species."

"Our wildlife is precious and an essential part of the earth's rich biodiversity, making it incumbent upon all of us to stand together and take concerted action to protect endangered species from prevailing threats," said Secretary General of the WCO, Kunio Mikuriya. "Already committed to protecting the environment, the global Customs community is pleased to be a party to this international consortium and I am sure that WCO Member Customs administrations will play a key role in strengthening border controls to combat wildlife crime through enhanced cooperation and the active sharing of vital information," Mikuriya added.

"We know what is causing the decline in numbers of wild tigers: illegal poaching, trafficking, and loss of habitat," said World Bank President Robert B. Zoellick. "But the good news is that tiger populations can recover. We have to protect their habitats and ranges; target illegal trade; and find ways that people can benefit more from live tigers than dead ones."

In the run-up to Saint Petersburg summit, an ICCWC concept group provided enforcement-related guidance to the Global Tiger Initiative and drafted the section on combating wildlife crime in the [Global Tiger Recovery Program](#). The ICCWC Letter of Understanding having been signed, the five agencies are now ready to help deliver action on the ground to bring criminals to justice.

Although specialized staff from the five agencies have worked together in the past to support national agencies in their efforts to tackle the increasingly organized and sophisticated nature of wildlife crime, this will be the first time that they work collaboratively in this field. ICCWC will bring together the expertise of each agency in a formidable manner.

The Letter of Understanding was signed in Lyon by the Secretary-General of CITES, John Scanlon, and Ronald K. Noble, Secretary-General of INTERPOL, and in Brussels by Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General of the World Customs Organization. Two more signatures were placed on the Letter today: those of Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Robert Zoellick, President of the World Bank.

The last two signatures having been added to the document today, the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) comes into effect.

Protected from international commercial trade through a listing in CITES Appendix I since 1975, tigers still suffer significantly from illegal trade. They are poached for their skins and body parts, which are used for decorative and traditional medicine purposes.

It is almost four decades since the world realized that tiger numbers were falling alarmingly. Since the 1970s, governments and the conservation community have spent tens of millions of dollars trying to save this magnificent animal. Those efforts have unfortunately not yet lead to a reverse in the decline in tiger populations, which is why the leaders of tiger range States are meeting in St Petersburg this week.

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