



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME FACT SHEET

Environmental crime — Trafficking in wildlife and timber

Transnational organized crime is found wherever money can be made from illicit activities. One such activity is environmental crime, in particular trafficking in wildlife and timber. The problem is particularly acute in developing countries, where Governments often lack the capacity to regulate the exploitation of their natural resources. Poor management of natural resources can lead to corruption and even violent conflict.

Though environmental crime is a global and multifaceted phenomenon, this fact sheet deals with just two aspects of it in certain parts of the world: trafficking in wildlife from Africa and South-East Asia to other areas in Asia, and trafficking in timber from South-East Asia to the European Union and other areas in Asia. The illegal trade in timber between South-East Asia and the European Union and other areas in Asia was worth an estimated \$3.5 billion in 2010.¹ By contrast, sales of elephant ivory, rhino horn and tiger parts in Asia were worth an estimated \$75 million in 2010, but the environmental impact of this crime is much greater than the relatively small income it generates for criminals.

Trafficking in wildlife from Africa and South-East Asia: overview

Widespread poverty and a lucrative overseas market for exotic animal products have resulted in the poaching of African and South-East Asian wildlife on a massive scale. In addition to the damage it causes to natural ecosystems, poaching also impacts on the tourism trade, which represents a key part of many national economies.

Elephants, rhinos and tigers are three of the biggest endangered species killed for their skins and/or bones. Ivory, rhino horn and tiger parts are among the most popular large animal “commodities” that are trafficked from various parts of Africa and South-East Asia to other parts of Asia. There are also numerous smaller wild species in South-East Asia that are either killed for traditional medicine, food and decorative products or captured for the pet trade.

Trafficking in wildlife from Africa and South-East Asia: the involvement of organized criminal groups

Well-organized criminal groups have turned environmental exploitation into a professional business, with high revenues encouraging the poaching of endangered and protected species in national parks. Every year, thousands of cases of poaching are reported by authorities in Africa and Asia. In just one incident, 450 elephants were reported killed by poachers in early 2012 in the Bouba Ndjida National Park in northern Cameroon.²

Well-organized commercial poachers are involved in smuggling ivory through or into many Asian countries. Between 1989 and 2009, there were at least 55 very large seizures of ivory, with an average volume of 2.3 tons. In the countries of destination, the shipments would have been worth about \$2 million apiece at the wholesale level.³

Wildlife trafficking: flows and prices

Elephants, rhinos and tigers are three of the best-known wildlife species that are killed for their body parts. Almost all ivory comes from African elephants and most of it is exported to Asia. Both African and Asian rhinos are targeted by poachers, and the few remaining tigers in the world, found in Asia, are hunted and killed for their body parts.

Elephants. In 2010, an estimated 7,500 elephants were killed, mostly in Central Africa. There are, on average, 92 ivory seizures per month, or about three per day.⁴ While the price of ivory varies between countries, the total value of the ivory entering the global market is estimated at about \$100 million a year. There are vast disparities between the prices paid in source countries and those paid in destination countries. While a kilogram of raw ivory sells for \$15 in Africa, it can fetch about \$850 in Asia. Value may also be added to the raw material if it is carved; the value of ivory objects cannot be gauged by their weight alone.⁵

Rhinos. After years of rhinos being killed for their horns, estimates place the world's wild rhino population at just 25,000.⁶ Although seizures of rhino horn are generally smaller than those of elephant ivory, rhino horn is worth far more per kilogram. The illicit trade in rhino horn was worth about \$8 million in 2010.⁷ As with elephant ivory, prices paid in source countries may be as little as 1 per cent of the final retail price which, after the horn has been shaved or powdered for sale, has at times reached between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per kilogram.⁸ South Africa is one of the countries most targeted by rhino poachers — in 2007, 13 rhinos were poached in the country; by 2011 this figure had jumped dramatically to 448, and numbers are expected to exceed 600 by the end of 2012.⁹

Tigers. Tiger parts continue to fetch high prices, with skins retailing for up to \$20,000 in China, and bones selling for up to \$1,200 per kilogram.¹⁰ As all parts of the animal are sold for various purposes, leaving no evidence of poaching, it is possible that many tigers are disappearing unnoticed. Based on reported poaching figures, trafficking in tiger parts from Africa and South-East Asia to other parts of Asia is worth about \$5 million per year.¹¹

Trafficking in wildlife from Africa to Asia

Although poaching affects a number of African countries, some are affected much more than others. Central Africa is the main source of elephant ivory and Southern Africa is used as a source of rhino horn. Animal parts are illegally shipped or transported by air to Asia by a variety of routes, often concealed in legitimate cargo, with criminal syndicates taking advantage of the growing legal trade between Africa and Asia.

Trafficking in wildlife within Asia

Asia serves as a source, transit and destination region for a large share of the endangered animals poached in the world; Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar are the main source countries. Areas of wilderness that extend across borders are particularly vulnerable to being used for transnational trafficking. By operating in such areas and working with corrupt authorities, criminal networks are able to transport poached animals with relative ease.

Both tigers and rhinos are hunted and killed in Asia. There are now only around 3,200 tigers left in the wild, down from an estimated 100,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century,¹² and the poaching of these animals is a deliberate and systematic crime. There is evidence suggesting that poachers may be "commissioned" to hunt them. Asia is home to three of the world's five rhino species and their numbers have been reduced to such an extent that experts have warned that they may become extinct within the lifetime of the next generation.¹³ In addition to these large animals, a variety of other wildlife species are targeted. Many die while being transported to destination countries.

Trafficking in timber from South-East Asia: overview

South-East Asia is home to some 7 per cent of the world's old-growth forests and many unique tree species. Regrettably, the region is experiencing the fastest deforestation rate on Earth. Some of this deforestation is a result of illicit logging and, in this way, organized crime contributes to irreversible environmental damage. Forests are crucial to absorbing carbon from the atmosphere and deforestation

therefore has a global impact. Local communities are also affected by environmental damage, which is often accompanied by corruption of officials, violence and loss of income and livelihoods.

It is estimated that more than half of global demand for illicitly logged timber comes from Asia and Europe and that about 20 per cent of the global total of illegally felled timber is imported into the European Union, and about 25 per cent into China.¹⁴

Trafficking in timber from South-East Asia: corruption and the involvement of organized criminal groups

Traffickers often rely on fraudulent documents to transport illegal timber across borders. Methods used include fraudulently declaring a protected hardwood as an ordinary variety or falsifying certificates of origin, thereby declaring wood obtained in a protected area to be from an authorized source.

One of the repercussions of the illegal trade in timber is corruption. In many instances, the documents needed to transport illegal timber are not forged but bought from corrupt officials in the source countries. Gangs involved in illegal logging may also receive assistance from corrupt officials.

Trafficking in timber from South-East Asia: flows and prices

Owing to its bulk, timber is generally transported by sea or by road and enters countries through official border crossings. Clandestine smuggling of timber is rare, and either fraudulent paperwork or bribery of customs officials is involved.

In the past, timber flows have mostly been illicit. For example, it was estimated that at one point in the first few years of the twenty-first century, 98 per cent of all the timber transported overland from Myanmar to China had been illegally logged. Similarly, at the height of the illegal logging problem in Indonesia, 80 per cent of the timber being transported out of the country had been illegally logged. At the time, the Government of Indonesia estimated that the illicit trade in timber was costing them \$4 billion annually — five times more than the country's 2004 health budget. At its peak, deforestation was occurring at a rate of 2 million hectares a year — an amount equivalent to 300 football fields every hour.¹⁵

In 2010, an estimated 10 million cubic metres of illegally logged timber was imported into the European Union and China from South-East Asia, with an import value of roughly \$3.5 billion.¹⁶ Most of this was in the form of furniture and other finished products, but some was raw timber. The primary source of illicitly logged timber was Indonesia. Criminal groups often fraudulently label Indonesian wood as coming from Malaysia and trans-ship it from other parts of the region.

What is being done?

Among the most influential of the many international conservation agreements that have been signed is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to which 175 States are parties. Under the Convention, States that do not take measures to protect endangered species are subject to escalating international pressure, which can ultimately result in trade sanctions.

The work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in countering environmental crime includes local, regional and global initiatives. The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), a partnership involving the CITES secretariat, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), UNODC, the World Bank and the World Customs Organization, works to bring coordinated support to national wildlife law enforcement agencies and related subregional and regional networks. In mid-2012, UNODC, in partnership with other members of ICWC, developed the *Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit*, which is aimed at assisting Governments in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their criminal justice responses to wildlife and forest crime.

At the local and regional levels, UNODC works extensively to tackle various forms of environmental crime. In South-East Asia in particular, it conducts widespread research to better guide countries on countering trafficking in wildlife and illegal logging and encourages Governments to increase their efforts to protect natural resources and convict perpetrators of crimes against the environment. Critically, the work of UNODC in this area also involves working with authorities to improve laws and increase international cooperation to respond to crimes against the environment.

International NGOs such as WWF also play an important role in lobbying Governments for greater action against environmental crime and collaborating with them on conservation issues. They also build awareness among the general public at the global and local levels and lead debate on these concerns.

Aside from these international and national initiatives, the role of the public is essential. Here are some of the things that the public can do:

- Demand reduction. Consumers have a big — if not the biggest — role to play in stopping the illegal trade in wildlife and timber. As an informed consumer, you can help reduce demand by being aware of which species are under protection. This includes knowing whether products such as rhino horn or tiger bones are used in traditional medicine and paying careful attention to labelling when buying exotic timber.
- Eco-tourism. As a tourist, you can choose your routes, visits and destinations carefully and support eco-tourism. It should also be a given that you do not take home with you any animal or wildlife products — particularly not those discussed above.
- Publicity. High profile individuals can speak out against environmental crimes. In some countries, traditional practices and beliefs and a desire for status symbols hinder efforts to curb wildlife crime. Influential public voices can help to dispel myths, expose the cruelty of poaching and highlight the illegality of the practices involved, thereby building support for change.
- Awareness-raising. Lack of knowledge or awareness often leads to unknowing consumption of illegal wildlife products. Governments, NGOs and individuals can help spread information about these issues within society.
- Providing alternatives and sustainable livelihoods. As poverty is one of the main factors driving the illegal trade in wildlife, supporting legal income-generating activities can be an important measure, indirectly helping to curb environmental crime.
- Business. Companies can take action through smart and sustainable business decisions. In the timber trade in particular, companies should check certificates to ensure that products are of legal origin. If companies refuse to buy illegally produced timber and wood products, it will lead to less revenue for traffickers, and therefore less deforestation.

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¹ *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.IV.6). Available from www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf.

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- ² Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, “CITES Secretary-General expresses grave concern over reports of mass elephant killings in Cameroon”, 28 February 2012. Available from www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/2012/20120228_elephant_cameroon.php.
- ³ *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ John E. Scanlon, Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, “Ivory and insecurity: the global implications of poaching in Africa”, written testimony to the United States of America Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, Washington, D.C., 24 May 2012. Available from www.cites.org/eng/news/SG/2012/20120525_SG_US-Senate_testimony.php.
- ⁷ *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ “Ivory and insecurity: the global implications of poaching in Africa”.
- ¹⁰ *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ “Ivory and insecurity: the global implications of poaching in Africa”.
- ¹⁴ *The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.