



April 2014

Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade: A Call to Action

SUMMARY

Illegal wildlife trade is said to be the one of the largest forms of illicit trade in the world, second only to illegal trade in drugs and dangerous weapons. Like these other forms of illicit trade, illegal trade in wildlife presents a grave threat to very existence of numerous species inhabiting our planet. International security is also threatened as civil conflicts surrounding illicit trade emerge. Proactive measures are urgently needed to address the dangers presented by the illegal wildlife trade to the whole of society. Specifically, stronger enforcement is necessary to eliminate illegal wildlife trade, as are incentives to reduce consumer demand. Increased collaboration is also needed between nations to ensure sustainable and alternative livelihoods. Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to the exploitation of their wildlife for illegal trade, and need support and resources to combat this crime. This is why World Animal Net (WAN) is calling upon the UN to specifically include wildlife protection (and animal welfare more generally) within the post-2015 development agenda.

BACKGROUND

Numerous species are at risk of disappearing forever; in large part due to the illegal wildlife trade. If the world does not act promptly, we will be too late to save many. As species are being decimated, societies too are increasingly threatened by the corruption and violence that accompany such illicit activity on multiple fronts. Indeed, as species are threatened, so too is the stability and the infrastructure of entire communities. 'Developing' nations, in particular, who are already challenged by social and economic circumstances, are especially susceptible to poachers wishing to exploit such circumstances, and are in dire need of additional resources and support to combat wildlife crime. Multifaceted tools are desperately needed to enhance enforcement against the organized crime of wildlife trafficking and bolster government response. World Animal Net joins the international community in calling strong enforcement of existing trade bans, heightened legal protection for animals at risk of being subject to illegal trade, and effective collaboration toward the development of policies and practices that do not promote the consumptive use of wildlife.

ENFORCEMENT

Illicit trade is, and should always be considered, a major international issue necessitating the involvement of qualified investigators and law enforcement authorities knowledgeable about wildlife crime and its implications. More than ever, the political will and funding is needed to combat such practices, which are increasingly 'professional' and also often connected other criminal activities such as illegal arms trading, money laundering and drug smuggling. In addition to the need to station full time inspectors in high risk states, greater coordination and collaboration on wildlife crime implementation and enforcement is needed across nations. Strong laws, funding of programs, the tightening of legal loopholes, preventative measures, a diversity of investigative and intelligence tools, meaningful prosecution and accountability of public officials, is needed at the local levels. However, truly effective outcomes call for solid multinational commitment to increasing enforcement efforts and networks, as well as the number of joint operations wherever possible.

STRONGER LEGAL PROTECTION

International agreements, such as CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity, should be strengthened to keep up with the ever-increasing threats posed by the illegal wildlife trade. Moreover, an effort should be made by countries who have incorporated CITES into their national legislation and enforcement systems to assist other countries in strengthening their laws and enforcement. Wherever possible, opportunities for meaningful local legislation should be explored.

REDUCTION IN DEMAND

Illicit wildlife trade cannot be halted without strong action to reduce consumer demand. Education is needed to promote awareness about the harmful effects of illegal wildlife trade; as well as exposing false product claims (which are often based on erroneous traditional beliefs) or, where appropriate, to establish sustainable alternatives that do not necessitate poaching. Widespread media campaigns and publications disseminated through multiple modalities that assist consumers in identifying and avoid products resulting from illegal trade can help achieve this outcome. Collaborations with stakeholders, including those within industries, civil society, and NGOs concerned and impacted by the trade in wildlife, are also critical in the development of sustainable practices and habits that will serve to benefit society as a whole.

COLLABORATION

In addition to education and public awareness campaigns, effective partnerships between governments, NGOs, civil society, and industry are needed to combat the illicit wildlife trade. Local citizens, who have been directly affected by poaching, for example, are key contributors to the solutions needed to address it. Furthermore, to effectively combat illicit trade in wildlife, regional partnerships and inter-agency operations are necessary to oversee ungoverned areas that are especially vulnerable. Successful models of collaboration should be studied and subsequently replicated. Such collaboration is especially vital in countries needing assistance to improve enforcement efforts in training, capacity building and improved investigations and strengthened enforcement.