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# Parliamentary Briefing

## International Wildlife Crime: House of Commons debate 6 February 2014

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31 January 2014

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### Summary

- WWF-UK welcomes the London Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade, and the work the Government has done to organise it and to secure high-level government participation from such a range of countries.
- We are in a poaching crisis that requires urgent action. Without such action, wild species, their local communities and countries' economic development face irreversible damage.
- We hope that the Conference will support, endorse and build upon commitments made in recent months in other meetings, as well as highlight national-level commitments to strategic actions addressing poaching, trafficking and demand reduction.
- Agreed actions from the Conference should include improving law enforcement and criminal justice, reducing demand for illegal wildlife products and improving sustainable livelihoods in order to incentivise local communities away from poaching and illegal trade.
- We hope that one outcome of the Conference will be a mechanism to allow monitoring of progress on the effective implementation of commitments made in order to ensure robust action. We favour the appointment of a Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General to ensure progress.
- In the UK, the Government must continue the cross-government approach to tackling the illegal wildlife trade that has been a feature of preparations for the London Conference, and commit to long-term funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit to ensure strong action at home.



President: His Royal Highness,  
The Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB, OM  
Chair: Ed Smith CBE  
Chief Executive: David Nussbaum

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## **The London Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade**

The London Conference on illegal wildlife trade will take place at Lancaster House on 12-13 February 2014. It will seek to secure commitments from the heads or foreign ministers of around 50 key priority governments (from source, transit, destination and influential countries) to combat the growing global threat posed by illegal wildlife trade. Its focus will be on elephants, rhinos and tigers. Addressing the drivers and issues relating to illegal trade in these species will have additional benefits to the trade in other illicit wildlife products. The Conference is supported by their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge, who we hope will be present at the high-level part of the event.

WWF strongly welcomes the Conference, and the leadership and cross-government commitment the Government has shown in setting it up (the event is being delivered through Defra, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Home Office and the Department for International Development). We hope that the Conference will result in serious action to tackle poaching and trafficking, and to help reduce the demand for illegal wildlife products.

The Conference will address three specific areas:

- Improving law enforcement and the role of the criminal justice system;
- Reducing demand for illegal wildlife products; and
- Supporting the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods.

## **The scale of the problem**

### Wildlife impacts

The scale of illegal wildlife trade is having a serious impact on the populations of threatened and iconic species and groups of animals. There are now as few as 3,200 tigers remaining in the wild, and illegal trade in their parts and products is one of the greatest threats they face. Between 2000 and 2012, the parts of at least 1,425 tigers were seized.

Meanwhile, poaching of rhinoceroses has soared in recent years, thanks to demand in some east Asian countries (notably Vietnam) for their horn, which is falsely thought, when powdered, to be a health tonic and hangover cure. 13 rhinos were killed in South Africa in 2007, but last year (2013) 1,004 animals were killed, at a rate of almost three per day. The figure was a sharp jump even from 2012, when 668 were killed, and no fewer than 606 of the deaths in 2013 were in the world-famous safari destination of Kruger National Park. The total population of both black and white rhino species in Africa is up to 25,000 animals.

In 2012, poachers killed an estimated 22,000 African elephants for their ivory. While populations in some parts of Africa are still healthy (and in places, like Namibia, increasing), in other areas, particularly central Africa (countries such as Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Congo, and Gabon), where the poaching rate is twice the continental average, they are now under serious pressure. Left unaddressed, poaching could cause the extinction of elephants in central Africa.

### A serious crime

Globally, wildlife crime is estimated to be worth around \$19 billion annually, and it is thought to be the fourth largest transnational illegal trade, after narcotics, counterfeiting and human trafficking.

Increased wealth in Asia is opening up new markets for illegal wildlife products, with growing demand in China, Vietnam and Thailand driving unprecedented levels of poaching of elephants, rhinos and tigers.

Lax customs and law enforcement allow criminal syndicates to smuggle illegal wildlife products across borders by land, sea and air, a trade which also generates profits to fund other illegal activities, such as corruption, money laundering and arms and drug trafficking. And there is currently all too little deterrent to the illegal wildlife trade, because high level traders and kingpins are rarely arrested, prosecuted, convicted or punished for their crimes.

### The human impact

Park rangers and communities living near protected areas are ill-equipped and inexperienced to tackle often heavily armed and ruthless poachers. Poaching syndicates have changed the way they operate and often now use sophisticated weaponry and equipment to increase their 'success rate' and avoid detection. These include helicopters, veterinary drugs and night-vision equipment. In addition to intimidating communities, criminal kingpins are also frequently involved in bribery of officials in order to get their way.

Poaching occurs across borders, with gangs of heavily-armed poachers emptying protected areas of their wildlife, as happened in Cameroon early in 2012. This theft of natural resources undermines the tourism industry in countries across Africa, which often rely heavily on the richness of their natural environment, as well as constituting a threat to territorial integrity and security.

Left unaddressed, wildlife crime allows organised crime to flourish, fuels regional conflicts and is also believed to support terrorist activity. In a report to the UN Security Council, in May 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighted increasing links between elephant poaching, weapons proliferation and regional insecurity, saying "illegal ivory trade may currently constitute an important source of funding for armed groups."

### **What do we want from the Conference?**

The proposed outcomes of the Conference are:

- A Declaration containing the political commitments to the change required to turn the tide on illegal wildlife trade. We have been working closely with the UK Government in seeking to influence the language of this declaration, which we believe should build on previous agreements, notably the Marrakech Declaration (see below);
- A clear description of the action that needs to be taken, and by whom, to ensure a co-ordinated global response to the trade. In many areas, strategies and agreements have already been developed, and the Conference will be an opportunity to secure high-level endorsement and support the implementation of these. It will also be an opportunity to identify where there are gaps;
- Commitments of resources to deliver these actions. Details have still to be confirmed.

We are calling on those attending the Conference to give their public support to commitments made at other recent events, including the Paris Declaration on illegal wildlife

trade from the Africa-France Summit on Peace and Security; the African Elephant Summit Urgent Measures; and the Marrakech Declaration.

#### The Marrakech Declaration

This Declaration is a ten step action plan to combat wildlife crime which was launched by the African Development Bank at its annual meeting in May 2013. The ten action points fall under three broad headings.

Under 'Building collaboration to combat illicit wildlife trafficking (IWT)', the Declaration calls for: (1) bilateral, regional and/or international co-operation agreements to combat IWT, particularly between countries which share trafficking trade routes; (2) deeper collaboration with international institutions dealing with IWT (among these are the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Customs Organisation and the World Bank); and (3) promotion of the understanding that IWT is a serious crime.

The second part of the Declaration, on 'Strengthening law enforcement', calls for: (4) increased financial and human resources to ensure the effectiveness of wildlife law enforcement, trade controls and monitoring; (5) the establishment of specialised Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Units within customs to provide expertise and resources and bolster the ability of customs to detect and seize illicit wildlife products; and (6) promotion of and active participation in a National Environmental Security Task Force (NEST) or similar multi-agency co-operative, as recommended by Interpol.

The third set of recommendations is on 'Penalising wildlife crime to the full extent of the law', and encompasses: (7) strengthening the judiciary sector to ensure that prosecutions for IWT are conducted effectively, to the full extent of the law and using the strongest penalties available; (8) changing or updating legislation where necessary to ensure that IWT of protected species is a criminal offence punishable by at least four years of prison; (9) ensuring that suspects apprehended for IWT are treated as serious criminals, including investigation of them in relation to other non-wildlife-related offences and potential seizure of their assets; and (10) publicising IWT as a serious crime under national law.

#### A UN Special Representative on illicit wildlife trafficking

Another critical outcome of the Conference must be full implementation of its decisions and commitments. WWF believes that this process could be facilitated by the establishment of a UN Special Representative on IWT, a high-level position that would report directly to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The Special Representative would be a global independent advocate raising momentum on the issue, acting as a bridge-builder and catalysing action by nations to ensure an ongoing high-level response to international wildlife crime. They would be able to push for compliance with and implementation of international commitments; support implementation of CITES; explore UN sanctions and pressure mechanisms for those proved to be involved in IWT; and support individual criminal justice efforts.

A Special Representative position would, of course, require a commitment of financial support from governments, sufficient to ensure that they could function effectively, with adequate support from dedicated staff and a research/investigative budget. WWF-UK believes that the Government could make a contribution towards this position using some of the very welcome £10 million commitment of funds for the fight against the illegal wildlife

trade made before Christmas by Defra and the Department for International Development. The estimated costs are \$1 million per annum, of which the UK could consider funding half.

#### The national picture

As outlined earlier in this briefing, WWF-UK warmly welcomes the actions of the Government in setting up and securing high-level attendance at the London Conference. However, another hoped for outcome of the Conference is national level commitments to strategic actions to address poaching, trafficking and demand reduction.

The UK already has an international reputation for leadership on wildlife conservation, one that will be further enhanced by the organisation of this Conference, and funds a number of excellent programmes for protecting species. There are, however, some areas in which we could do even more.

The cross-government approach to the Conference has been very welcome, including the establishment of a taskforce on wildlife trafficking across departments. We would like this group to encourage and co-ordinate inter-departmental and inter-ministerial co-operation. It should also develop a cross-government action plan and be accountable for its delivery.

The Ministry of Justice and the Crown Prosecution Service should commit to treating IWT as a serious crime, and give it the same attention as other forms of transnational crime. The judiciary should prosecute to the full extent of the law, and ensure that penalties are applied that reflect the gravity of these offences and can have a real deterrent effect. We would like to see the Sentencing Council introduce sentencing guidelines for wildlife crimes, and training by the Magistrates' Association in relation to wildlife crime.

The Home Office and Defra should announce secure, long-term funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit. The NWCU plays an important domestic role in tackling wildlife crime, including IWT, but it has been funded on a year-by-year basis, often with significant uncertainty as to whether its funding will continue. A commitment in the next Spending Review to sustainable, long-term funding would allow this Unit to continue to operate to its full potential, recruiting and retaining the specialist staff and tools it needs to function well. Action on illegal wildlife trade should also be properly resourced within all relevant bodies, including the UK Border Force, the National Crime Agency and police forces.

Prosecutions should be sought under both COTES (Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations and Customs and Excise Management Act legislation, but other legislation should also be used to prosecute wildlife crime, including fraud and proceeds of crime legislation, as well as serious crime prevention orders.

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<b>Date</b>	3 February 2014

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