

Media Release

Embargoed to 00:01 GMT Monday, July 23, 2012

Countries fail to protect endangered species from illegal trade

Geneva – Poor performances by key countries are threatening the survival of wild rhinos, tigers and elephants, a new WWF report has found. The analysis, released as governments gather in Geneva this week to discuss a range of issues related to wildlife trade, rates 23 of the top African and Asian nations facing high levels of poaching and trafficking in ivory, rhino horn and tiger parts.

The report, entitled *Wildlife Crime Scorecard: Assessing Compliance with and Enforcement of CITES Commitments for Tigers, Rhinos and Elephants*, examines of the many countries considered as range, transit or consumer countries for these species. It gives countries scores of green, yellow or red for each animal, as applicable, as an indicator of recent progress. WWF has found that illegal trade persists in virtually all 23 countries reviewed, but the scorecard seeks to differentiate between countries where it is actively being countered from those where current efforts are entirely inadequate.

Among the worst performers is Viet Nam that received two red scores, for rhinos and tigers. Viet Nam is identified in the report as the top destination country for rhino horn, which has fuelled a poaching crisis in South Africa. A record 448 South African rhinos were killed for their horns in 2011 and the country, which itself receives a yellow for rhinos, has lost an additional 262 already this year. According to the report, many Vietnamese have been arrested or implicated in South Africa for acquiring rhino horns illegally, including Vietnamese diplomats.

“It is time for Viet Nam to face the fact that its illegal consumption of rhino horn is driving the widespread poaching of endangered rhinos in Africa, and that it must crack down on the illegal rhino horn trade. Viet Nam should review its penalties and immediately curtail retail markets, including Internet advertising for horn,” said Elisabeth McLellan, Global Species Programme manager at WWF.

Inadequate enforcement of domestic ivory markets in China is also highlighted in the report. China receives a yellow score for elephants indicating a failure by the country to effectively police its legal ivory markets. “The ongoing flow of large volumes of illegal ivory to China suggests that such ivory may be moving into legal ivory trade channels,” the report says.

China is urged to dramatically and consistently improve its enforcement controls for ivory and to communicate to Chinese nationals in Africa that anyone caught importing illegal wildlife products into China would be prosecuted, and if convicted, severely penalized.

Tens of thousands of African elephants are being killed by poachers each year for their tusks and China and Thailand are top destinations for illegal African ivory. Thailand receives a red score for its failure to close a legal loophole that makes it easy for retailers to sell ivory from poached African elephants.

“In Thailand, illegal African ivory is being openly sold in up-scale boutiques that cater to unsuspecting tourists. Governments will be taking up this troubling issue this week. So far Thailand has not responded adequately to concerns and, with the amount of ivory of uncertain origin in circulation, the only credible option at this stage is a ban on ivory trade,” McLellan said.



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Elephant poaching is at crisis levels in Central Africa, where rhinos were likely poached to extinction. Last year witnessed the elephant highest poaching rates across the continent since records began. Early this year hundreds of elephants were killed in a single incident in a Cameroon national park. “Given the escalation of elephant poaching in Africa and the increased levels of organized crime involved in the trade, it is clear that the situation is now critical,” the report found.

Wildlife crime not only poses a threat to animals, but is a risk to people, territorial integrity, stability and rule of law. Regional cooperation is needed in Central Africa to counter the flows of illegal ivory and arms spilling across borders. WWF commends Central African governments for signing a regional wildlife law enforcement plan and urges them to make its implementation a top priority, allocating resources to the plan and improving the efficacy of prosecutions for those implicated in poaching or illegal trade.

“Although most Central African countries receive yellow or red scores for elephants, there are some encouraging signals. Last month Gabon burned its entire ivory stockpile, to ensure that no tusks would leak into illegal trade, and President Ali Bongo committed to both increasing protections in the country’s parks and to ensuring that those committing wildlife crimes are prosecuted and sent to prison,” said WWF Global Species Programme manager Wendy Elliott.

Other bright spots from the report are green scores for India and Nepal for each of the three species groups. In 2011, Nepal celebrated a year without any rhino poaching incidents, which was largely attributed to improvements to anti-poaching and other law enforcement efforts.

WWF’s *Wildlife Crime Scorecard* is being released as member countries of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) hold their annual Standing Committee meeting. The conservation organization is set to launch a global campaign to fight illegal wildlife trade, which is putting the future of elephants, rhinos and tigers at risk. Learn more at panda.org/wildlifecrime.

WWF experts available for interviews:

Wendy Elliott, Global Species programme manager (English)

Dr Carlos Drews, Global Species Programme director (English, German & Spanish)

Dr Joseph Okori, African rhino programme coordinator (English)

Lamine Sebogo, African elephant programme coordinator (English & French)

To schedule an interview at the CITES meeting, by telephone or by video Skype:

Alona Rivord, +41 79 959 1963, arivord@wwfint.org

Photos are available here: <https://photos.panda.org/gpn/external?albumId=4278>

About WWF

WWF is one of the world’s largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF’s mission is to stop the degradation of the Earth’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world’s biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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