

UN Agency: Tiger on verge of extinction

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(AP) -- The world has "failed miserably" at protecting tigers in the wild, bringing an animal that is a symbol for many cultures and religions to "the verge of extinction," a top official with the United Nations wildlife agency said Monday.

Just 20 years ago there were 100,000 tigers in Asia, but now only 3,200 remain in the wild, according to U.N. Willem Wijnstekers, the secretary general of the 175-nation Convention on International Trade in [Endangered Species](#), or CITES.

He called on countries to come up with strategies, and cooperate with international agencies such as Interpol, to end poaching and illegal trade in [tiger](#) products.

"We must admit that we have failed miserably," Wijnstekers said at the two-week conference in the Gulf state of Qatar. "Although the tiger has been prized throughout history ... it is now literally on the verge of [extinction](#)."

Tigers are poached for their skins and parts of their bodies are prized for decoration and traditional medicine.

Delegates at the U.N. conference will also consider the spike in rhino poaching and ways to combat criminal networks involved in the [illegal trade](#) in horns in parts of Africa and Asia. All in all, there are 42 proposals on the table, ranging from stopping elephant poaching to banning trade in [polar bear](#) skins.

Later this week, an all-out ban on the export of Atlantic bluefin will also be discussed, a contentious issue that has the countries of Asia and the West locking horns over a fish prized in sushi.

Global stocks of bluefin are dwindling, especially in the Atlantic, and some governments around the world are increasingly supporting a complete trade ban to let the fish recover.

The issue pits the Europeans and Americans against fishing nations in North Africa and Asia, especially Japan, which has already vowed to ignore any bluefin ban.

About 80 percent of the species fished ends up in Japan. Raw tuna is a key ingredient in traditional dishes such as sushi and sashimi, and the [bluefin](#) variety - called "hon-maguro" in Japan - is particularly prized.

A bid to regulate the trade in red and pink corals - harvested to make expensive jewelry - could also divide the delegates.

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