

Hong Kong customs seize four tonnes of smuggled ivory

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Hong Kong customs officers seized almost four tonnes of ivory, pictured here, which is worth about \$3.4 million. The ivory was hidden in shipments from Kenya and Tanzania, officials said Saturday.

Hong Kong customs officers seized almost four tonnes of ivory worth about \$3.4 million, hidden in shipments from Kenya and Tanzania, officials said Saturday.

The 1,209 pieces of raw ivory tusk and a small number of ivory

ornaments were discovered in two containers marked "plastic scrap" and "roscoco beans", shipped to Hong Kong earlier this week, a customs official said.

The smuggled ivory, weighing 3.81 tonnes (8,400 pounds)—Hong Kong's largest ever seizure—was found hidden among bags of plastic scraps and beans by customs officers acting on a tip-off from counterparts in [mainland China](#).

"The total seizure is worth about HK\$26.7 million (\$3.4 million)," the Hong Kong customs department said, adding that it will step up efforts with mainland Chinese authorities to combat transnational smuggling activities.

Mainland [Chinese authorities](#) arrested seven individuals, including a Hong Kong resident, in relation to the seizure, [public broadcaster](#) RTHK said.

Under Hong Kong law, anyone found guilty of importing unmanifested cargo into the southern Chinese city—a major shipping hub—faces imprisonment of up to seven years and a maximum fine of HK\$2 million.

In addition, those guilty of importing, exporting or possessing an endangered species for commercial purposes face up to two years in jail and a maximum HK\$5 million fine, customs officials said.

The international trade in [elephant ivory](#), with rare exceptions, has been outlawed since 1989 after elephant populations in Africa dropped from millions in the mid-20th century to some 600,000 by the end of the 1980s.

However, a rise in the illegal trade in ivory has been fuelled by demand

in Asia and the Middle East, where elephant tusks are used in [traditional medicines](#) and to make ornaments.

Africa is home to an estimated 472,000 elephants whose survival is threatened by poaching, illegal game hunting and [habitat loss](#).

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