

Treat illegal wildlife trade as serious crime: CITES

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A man shouts during a protest on January 22, 2012 in Nairobi during a protest to put pressure on the government to declare the ongoing rampant poaching of particularly rhino and elephant, a national disaster. Illegal trade in wildlife products like ivory and rhino horn must be treated as a serious crime, the head of UN wildlife trade regulator CITES said Thursday.

Illegal trade in wildlife products like ivory and rhino horn must be treated as a serious crime in order to end the devastating poaching of protected species, the head of UN wildlife trade regulator CITES said

Thursday.

"This is serious crime, and you need serious resources and serious penalties" to address it, CITES Secretary General John Scanlon told reporters in Geneva.

Speaking ahead of a meeting of CITES's 177 member states in Bangkok in early March, Scanlon said finding better ways to crack down on the illegal trade of ivory and rhino horn were among the top issues on the agenda.

Pointing out that [illegal wildlife trade](#) is estimated to rake in about \$20 billion a year, he insisted that such crimes needed to be treated in the same manner as for instance the international illegal drug trade.



Indian forest officials stand near a one horned horn Rhinoceros, which was killed and de-horned by the poachers in India on September 27, 2012. Illegal trade in wildlife products like ivory and rhino horn must be treated as a serious crime in

order to end the devastating poaching of protected species, the head of UN wildlife trade regulator CITES said Thursday.

A [World Wildlife Fund](#) report last month listed the illicit sale of wildlife products as the fourth-largest illegal [global trade](#) after narcotics, counterfeiting and [human trafficking](#).

The sharp increase in poaching of protected species like [elephants](#) and [rhinos](#) in recent years appears to be fuelled by organised criminals eager to reap massive profits at very low risk, and is also believed to be helping to fund insurgencies in Africa, Scanlon said.

"These trends with ivory and rhino horn are going up (so much) that we will start wiping out local populations very soon," he warned.

Rhino horn can sell for as much as \$80,000 a kilo, and [poachers](#) have killed some 2,000 rhinos in the past two years—a huge number considering only about 25,000 rhinos remain, he said.

Elephant poaching in Africa has also increased sharply, with devastating incidents like the family of 11 elephants killed in a Kenyan park earlier this month, and the up to 450 elephants slaughtered last February in Cameroon by poacher gangs, likely from Chad and Sudan.

"It would appear that some individuals are stockpiling. You could say they are banking on extinction (and) assuming that as these species become rarer, the rhino horn and the ivory will become more valuable," Scanlon said.

To halt the trade, authorities need to work harder to trace the illegal products to the people creating the demand, he said.

"Until we find out who ordered (the products), prosecute them, convict them and impose a serious penalty, we're not going to be able to stop this."

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