

HK seizes baby elephant tusks in major ivory haul

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Seized ivory tusks are displayed during a Hong Kong Customs press conference on January 4, 2013. More than 1,000 ivory tusks, mainly from baby elephants, were seized by Hong Kong customs in their biggest haul in three years, officials said on Friday.

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The [tusks](#), which weigh over two tonnes and are worth more than US\$2 million, were discovered at the city's main port in a cargo [container](#) from the African country of Togo.

It was headed for mainland China and the bags of tusks were hidden beneath planks of wood.

"We profiled a container from Togo, Africa, for cargo examination. First, we found irregularities at an X-ray check. Then, we opened the container and discovered the tusks of different sizes," Wong Wai-hung, a customs' commander, told reporters.

He added that the tusks were buried underneath planks of wood in the corner of the six-metre (20-foot) container, which had been declared as carrying wood only.

More than 1,148 tusks were seized in the haul at Hong Kong's Kwai Chung terminal, worth around HK\$17.5m (US\$2.3m).

It was the biggest [ivory](#) seizure in the southern Chinese city since 2010, since when another nine cases have been recorded.

Ng Kwok-leung, customs' group head of ports control, said that the majority of the tusks seized in the operation were from baby elephants.



Elephants at a game reserve in Kenya on December 30, 2012. More than 1,000 ivory tusks, mainly from baby elephants, were seized by Hong Kong customs in their biggest haul in three years, officials said on Friday.

"It was a big haul, we should be happy. But when I looked at these tusks, we saw very small tusks of baby elephants. We were sad because they were killed for nothing," he said.

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

Ivory is popular with Chinese collectors who see it as a valuable investment.

It is often intricately carved to depict anything from devotional Buddhist

scenes to wildlife and bizarre fantasies, and is also turned into more mundane household objects such as chopsticks.

Conservation groups have accused the Chinese government of failing to enforce laws to control the illicit trade.

Hong Kong, a free port which runs one of the biggest container terminals in the world, often sees the seizure of products from banned trades.

But customs officials said on Friday said there was "no concrete information" to show that the financial hub had become a gateway for ivory smuggling, despite its proximity to China.

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