

Togo police seize 700 kilos of ivory

August 9 2013



Illustration: Seized ivory tusks are displayed to the press in Hong Kong on August 7, 2013. Police in Togo seized 700 kilogrammes of ivory in the capital city of Lome, with authorities unsure of its origin.

Police in Togo have seized 700 kilogrammes (1,540 pounds) of ivory in the capital city of Lome, the government told AFP on Thursday.

"The anti-drug brigade last Tuesday seized from a Lome shop 700 kilos of ivory belonging to a Togolese man, aged 58. He was arrested," said Dede Ahoefa Ekoue, the minister of the environment and [forest resources](#).

"As yet, we do not have all the information on which country the ivory came from. We know today that there are several networks and investigations are underway to see if the Togolese belongs to one of these networks, as this is the first big seizure by Togo," she said.

"We believe that there is now an urgent need to provide a strong, international response to lead the fight against trafficking," added the minister.

According to Togo police, some 116 ivory horns were seized in 2011 and [traffickers](#) were arrested.

International trade in ivory was banned in 1989 by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

But traffic has grown in recent years due to strong demand in the Middle East and Asia, where elephant tusks are used in the manufacture of decorative objects and [traditional medicine](#).

According to estimates by CITES, more than 25,000 African elephants were poached in 2012.

In Washington, State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki commended the Togolese authorities in a statement.

"This arrest represents an important step in protecting valuable African wildlife and investigating criminal organizations," she said.

"We urge Togolese authorities to conduct a full investigation and hold accountable to the fullest extent of the law those who engaged in the trafficking of ivory.

"As demonstrated by the Executive Order signed by President Obama on

July 1 during his visit to Africa, combating wildlife trafficking is an important priority of the United States."

She said Washington would "continue to work with partner nations to support efforts to put an end to this [illegal activity](#), which threatens security and the rule of law, undermines conservation efforts, robs local communities of their economic base, and contributes to the emergence and spread of disease".

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