

UN Security Council declares war on ivory poachers, traffickers

February 3 2014, by André Viollaz



Seized ivory tusks are displayed during a Hong Kong Customs press conference on January 4, 2013

The United Nations Security Council is cracking down on ivory hunters and traffickers who finance armed groups in Africa in a new initiative that has been welcomed by conservationists.

Two resolutions adopted by the council last week—one relating to the

Central African Republic, the other to the Democratic Republic of Congo—stated that the trade in illegal wildlife was fueling conflicts in the region and bankrolling organized crime.

Under the resolutions, the council can slap sanctions, such as freezing assets or restricting travel, on any individual found to be involved in wildlife trafficking.

The resolutions were primarily designed to target a number of armed rebel groups operating in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The UN also suspects the Lord's Resistance Army run by the ruthless warlord Joseph Kony uses the illegal ivory trade as a source of generating finances.

Other groups believed to benefit from the [illegal wildlife trade](#) include Somalia's Al-Shabaab Islamist militant group and Sudan's fearsome Janjaweed militia.

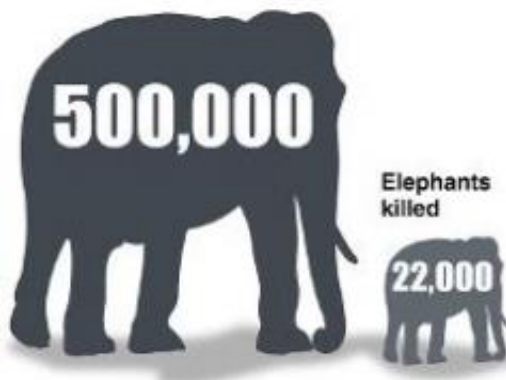
"This is the first time that a United Nations Security Council sanctions regime has targeted wildlife poachers and traffickers," said Wendy Elliott, species programme manager at the World Wildlife Fund told AFP. "It should act as a deterrent."

"There is no silver bullet to end this traffic, this is not going to solve the problem instantly but a year ago wildlife trafficking was not seen as a criminal issue, just an environmental one," Elliott added.

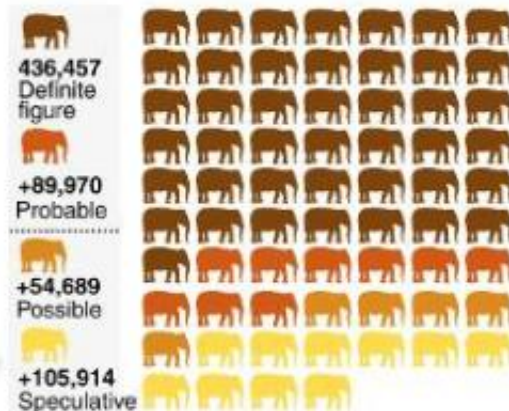
The future of African elephants threatened

Poaching and the trade in ivory could result in one fifth of the population wiped out in 10 years.

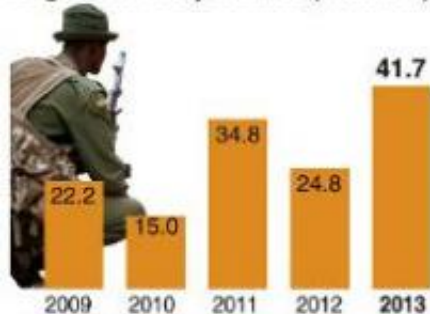
Estimated number of elephants (in 2012)



The hard task of checking their numbers



Large scale* ivory seizures (in tonnes)



Sources: UICN, Cites Traffic *Over 500 kilos

Eight countries accused of passivity over the fate of elephants:



An estimated 60 elephants are slain each day in Africa, where the total numbers of the animals has plummeted by half since 1980 to just 500,000

The resolution means that traffickers can now be targeted by officials from different government agencies such as interior and finance ministries, as well as customs.

Since 2009, the trade in poaching has escalated to near industrial levels, with more than 500 kilograms of ivory seized worldwide, threatening elephants and rhinos with extinction despite the existence of CITES (The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).

An estimated 60 elephants are slain each day in Africa, where the total numbers of the animals has plummeted by half since 1980 to just 500,000.

Lucrative criminal trade

In February 2012, traffickers from South Sudan massacred more than 300 elephants in the Bouba N'Djidda National Park in northern Cameroon.

In May last year, taking advantage of the chaos embroiling the Central African Republic, poachers armed with Kalashnikov assault weapons killed at least 26 animals in the fabled "village of elephants" the WWF said, a reserve set up Dzanga Bai World Heritage Site.

If the slaughter continues at the same rate, Africa will lose 20 percent of its elephant population over the next decade, according to projected estimates from the International Union for Conservation of Nature.



Game rangers look at the large bloated carcass of an adult elephant killed for its tusks in the Ishasha Valley, Virunga National Park on March 5, 2012

The illegal trade in ivory and other wildlife is the fourth most lucrative revenue stream for criminal gangs in Africa after drugs, counterfeiting and human trafficking. Ivory can fetch up to \$2,000 per kilo on the black market in Asia, it's most common destination.

The UN and conservationists want a twin-pronged approach, targeting both producers of ivory in Africa—including countries such as Gabon, Kenya, Zambia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Uganda—and consumer countries such as China and Thailand. Transit countries on ivory smuggling routes, such as Kenya, Tanzania, Malaysia and Vietnam, would also be targeted.

"It's a simmering issue," a UN diplomat told AFP. Two international conferences to address the subject had already taken place in Botswana and France last December, the diplomat noted.

British Prime Minister David Cameron meanwhile has convened a summit on the trafficking of endangered species from February 12 and 13.

"The idea is to get the highest level of political commitment from the countries involved (in the London conference)," Elliott said.

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