

London wildlife summit moves to choke off illegal markets

February 14 2014, by Jacques Klopp



(L- R) Princes Harry, William and Charles sit alongside Foreign Secretary William Hague at the Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference at Lancaster House in London on February 13, 2014

More than 40 countries including China and African states have signed a declaration aimed at stamping out the illegal trade in wildlife, in a move broadly welcomed by conservation groups.

The London Declaration urges practical steps to end the [illegal trade](#) in rhino horn, tiger parts and elephant tusks that contributes to criminal

activity worth more than \$19 billion (14 billion euros) each year.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague, who hosted Thursday's meeting, said: "I believe the measures we have agreed can mark a crucial turning point."

Hague highlighted the attendance of China and Vietnam, two major consumers of the banned products. Beijing sent Forestry Vice Minister Zhang Jianlong.

"I do welcome the involvement of China (and) the constructive approach from their minister and from other Asian countries, but there will be more work to do," Hague said.

He highlighted the progress that China had made in reducing the number of sharks killed to make [shark fin soup](#), a traditional Chinese delicacy.

"The conference wants to follow this example in other areas," he said.

Conservation groups gave the declaration a largely positive reception, but said it did not go far enough.



Britain's Prince Charles (C), Prince William (R), and Prince Harry (L) arrive for the Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference at Lancaster House in London on February 13, 2014

Mary Rice of the London-based Environmental Investigation Agency said: "This has been an unprecedented gathering, the first indication that many of the world's governments are really serious about combating organised wildlife crime.

"We would have liked them to go further and, specifically with regard to ivory and tigers, close down legal domestic markets."

Chad, Gabon, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Botswana announced a separate action plan to protect elephants of which 25,000 are killed each year by

poachers, according to official estimates.

Botswana will organise a conference in 2015 to evaluate progress on the initiative.

Opening the meeting, British heir to the throne Prince Charles said that while it was important to tackle poachers, the key thing was to "attack demand" for rare creatures which are used to produce traditional medicines and other products.

Charles said the conference declaration would "address what is the most significant problem in my view—that of demand for and consumption of specific products from critically endangered wildlife."



Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge (L), and Britain's Prince Charles, Prince of Wales (R), talk during the Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference at Lancaster House in London on February 13, 2014

"Most recently, demand from Asia—particularly China—has fuelled the trade, but we also know that the United States and Europe are contributing to it," he said.

While estimates of the value of the illegal trade in wildlife vary—London's Chatham House think-tank puts it at \$10 billion—all the participants agree that poaching is accelerating at an alarming rate.

The conference heard that 1,000 rhinos were killed in South Africa last year compared with just 13 in 2007, and the number of tigers living wild in Asia has plunged from 100,000 to just 3,200 in the space of 10 years.

Martial arts film star Jackie Chan attended the conference to call for urgent action. He told AFP: "I don't want my grandchildren to look in a book and say 'what is that, rhino?'.

"We have already destroyed the earth enough."

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