

# Global effort needed to stem elephant slaughter

July 9 2014, by Nina Larson

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An elephant and its calf graze on October 8, 2013 at Amboseli National Park, approximately 220 kms southeast of Nairobi

Elephants will be wiped out in some parts of Africa unless more countries get involved in efforts to prevent poaching and ivory smuggling, according to wildlife regulator CITES.

"We need to widen the net," John Scanlon, the chief of the Convention

on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), told AFP on the sidelines of a meeting in Geneva this week focused on [illegal wildlife trade](#).

Over the past three years, more than 60,000 elephants have been killed in Africa, "far exceeding the number of elephants being born," Scanlon said.

He warned that "in some regions, in particular central Africa, the local populations are being decimated and they will be driven to extinction locally in very quick time."

Organised crime syndicates and rebel militia looking for ways to fund insurgencies in Africa have become increasingly involved, eager to reap the benefits as demand in Asia for ivory to use in decorations and traditional medicines drives a multi-billion-dollar illicit trade.

Participants at the Geneva meeting insisted countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria—so far considered to be of only secondary concern as transit countries for illegal ivory—should speed up the process of drafting their own action plans.

They also called for concrete action for several nations that until now had only been on a watch list, including Cambodia, whose significance as a transit country is believed to be growing after several large ivory seizures were made there this year, and ivory trade hubs Angola and Laos.

"They have actually turned out to be countries of real concern," Scanlon said.

Ben Janse van Rensburg, a former South African police officer who heads CITES' enforcement support unit, meanwhile said the broader

focus showed the efforts already being made were succeeding.

"As you implement measures in primary concern countries, you often see crime trends shift to other countries," he told AFP, stressing the importance of getting more countries onboard "to close all the gaps that may exist."

## 'Time is of the essence'

At a March 2013 meeting of all 180 CITES members, eight African and Asian countries "of particular concern" were asked to draft National Ivory Action Plans to tackle the problem.

Janse van Rensburg hailed the progress made in the short time since those plans were created.

The three African "source" countries on that list, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, had especially made large advances in seizing illegal ivory, he said.

They "made more ivory seizures before the ivory leaves the African continent than we've seen in any other years before," he said.

William Kiprono, who heads Kenya's Wildlife Service, said his country was cracking down hard on poachers and illegal ivory traders, with life prison sentences.

"Time is of the essence. If we wait then these criminals are going to decimate our wildlife," he told AFP.

Several of the Asian "destination" [countries](#), and China in particular, had meanwhile been destroying large stockpiles of illegal ivory.

This, according to Scanlon, sends "a very powerful message to the hard-core criminals that are involved in this."

The message, he said, was that "we do not accept and we do not tolerate the illegal trade in [ivory](#), and if we find it we will seize it and confiscate it and destroy it."

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