

Half-tonne of smuggled ivory seized in Saudi

October 19 2014



Customs agents at King Khaled International Airport in Riyadh seized half a tonne of ivory being smuggled from Africa to east Asia

Authorities in Saudi Arabia say they have seized half a tonne of ivory being smuggled from Africa to east Asia.

Customs agents at King Khaled International Airport in Riyadh intercepted the shipment, which was in transit, the official SPA news agency said on Saturday.

They found 588 pieces of different shapes and sizes weighing about 490 kilograms (1,078 pounds) hidden in the luggage of a passenger on a flight from an African country to east Asia, it said, without elaborating.

A 1989 ban on the [ivory trade](#) has not stopped [criminal gangs](#) seeking to exploit a continued demand for tusks in Asia.

Poaching of African rhinos is increasing to meet demand from Asia, where the horn has long been used in traditional medicines for a variety of ailments, including fever and rheumatism.

Thousands of elephants are also killed across Africa very year for their tusks, which are prized especially in China for use in making decorations and trinkets.

According to the World Wildlife Fund, the African elephant population has dropped from between three million and 5 million to approximately 400,000 over the past century.

In January, authorities in the African nation of Togo found 3.8 tonnes of ivory in port containers bound for Vietnam.

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