

China to ban ivory trade by end of 2017

December 30 2016



China has a stockpile of ivory purchased with CITES approval in 2008, which it releases for sale with certification

China will ban all domestic ivory trade and processing by the end of 2017, state media reported Friday, a move hailed by activists as a "game changer" for African elephants.

African ivory is highly sought after in China where it is seen as a status symbol—prices for a kilo (2.2 pounds) can reach as much as \$1,100.

"China will gradually stop the processing and sales of ivories for commercial purposes by the end of 2017," the official Xinhua news agency said, citing a government statement.

"Before that deadline, law enforcement agencies will continue to clamp down on illegalities associated with the elephant's tusk," Xinhua added, citing an official with the State Forestry Administration.

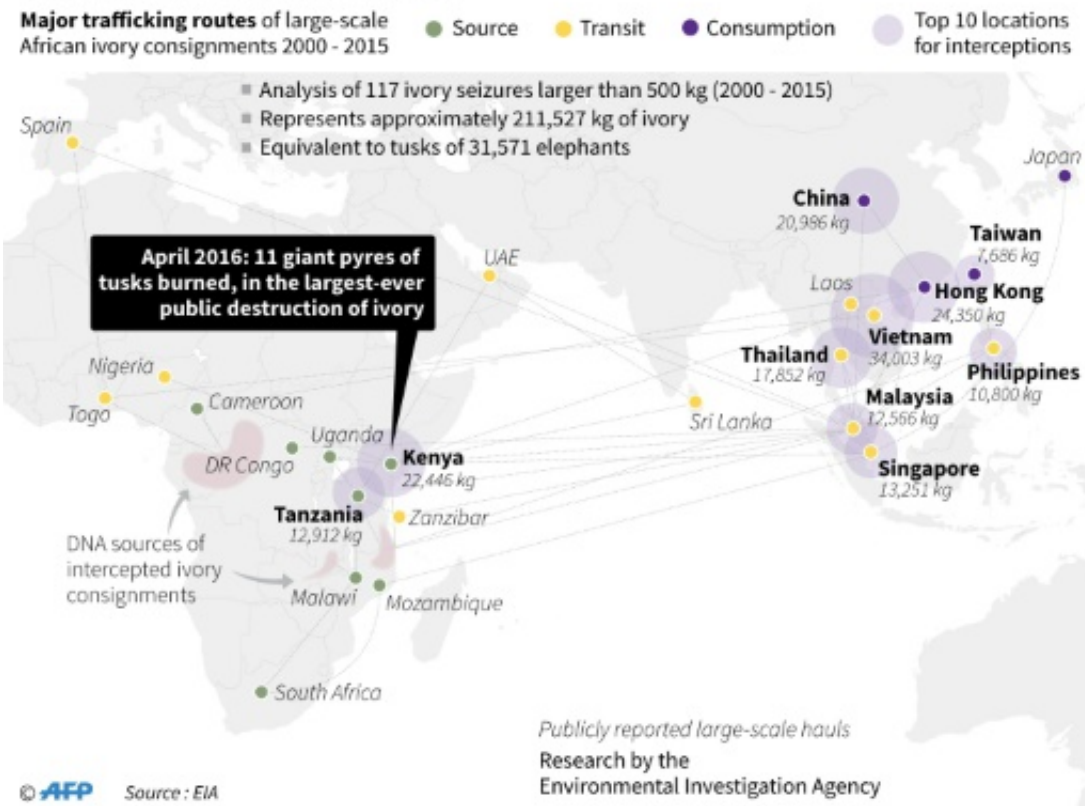
The announcement follows Beijing's announcement in March to widen a ban on imports of all ivory and ivory products acquired before 1975, after pressure to restrict a trade that sees thousands of elephants slaughtered every year.

Xinhua said the complete ban would affect "34 processing enterprises and 143 designated trading venues, with dozens to be closed by the end of March 2017".

"This is great news that will shut down the world's largest market for elephant ivory," Aili Kang, executive director of the Wildlife Conservation Society in Asia, said in a statement.

The global ivory network

Major trafficking routes of large-scale African ivory consignments 2000 - 2015



Major trafficking routes of large-scale African ivory consignments 2000-2015

"I am very proud of my country for showing this leadership that will help ensure that elephants have a fighting chance to beat extinction. This is a game changer for Africa's elephants."

Conservationists estimate that more than 20,000 elephants were killed for their ivory last year, with similar tolls in previous years. The WWF campaign group says 415,000 of the animals remain.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which took effect in 1975, banned the ivory trade in 1989.

China permits the resale of ivory bought before the 1989 ban—and also has a stockpile purchased with CITES approval in 2008, which it releases for sale with certification.

WWF also praised China's move to a complete ban but called on the Chinese territory of Hong Kong to bring forward a plan to end its ivory trade by 2021.

WWF said legal research published by the conservation group shows an ivory ban could be imposed "much sooner under current Hong Kong law".

"With China's market closed, Hong Kong can become a preferred market for traffickers to launder illegal ivory under cover of the legal ivory trade," said Cheryl Lo, senior wildlife crime officer at WWF.

The United States—the world's second-largest consumer of illegal ivory after China—announced in June a near-total ban on the trade of African elephant ivory but with notable exemptions including antiques.

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Citation: China to ban ivory trade by end of 2017 (2016, December 30) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-12-china-ivory.html>

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