

Wildlife groups urge sanctions for ivory offenders

21 February 2013



Photo taken on February 9, 2013 shows elephants in the Addo Elephants Park near Port Elizabeth in South Africa. Conservationists on Thursday called for sanctions against the world's top offender nations in the illegal ivory trade to tackle a surge in poaching of African elephants.

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Wildlife groups WWF and TRAFFIC issued a joint call for governments due to meet in Bangkok next month under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of [Wild Fauna](#) and Flora (CITES) to take action against host country Thailand as well as Nigeria and the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#).

"It's crucial that CITES use the authority it has to confront the problem," WWF director general Jim Leape told a teleconference ahead of the gathering of officials from 177 governments in the Thai capital from March 3-14.

"We're looking to the CITES parties to sanction the

three countries that are the biggest part of the problem in the [ivory trade](#), and that is Thailand, the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) and Nigeria."

Under the proposal, CITES member states would halt trading with the three offender countries in all 35,000 species covered by the convention until they take steps to control the trade in ivory.

"We're seeing a poaching crisis here of a kind that we haven't seen for a long time—a real surge in poaching both against elephants and rhinos," Leape said.

Poaching for illegal ivory claims the lives of up to 30,000 [African elephants](#) each year, according to WWF.

Africa is now home to an estimated 472,000 elephants, whose survival is also threatened by a rising [human population](#) that is causing [habitat loss](#).

Another major concern is the fate of the continent's rhinos.

A record 668 South African rhinos were slaughtered for their horns in 2012—an increase of nearly 50 percent compared with 2011—while 100 more have been killed since the start of this year, according to WWF.

The illegal trade is mostly fuelled by demand in Asia and the Middle East, where elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns are used to make ornaments and in [traditional medicine](#).

While Beijing has taken steps to respond to the problem, demand there is still a major driver "so it's extremely important that China acts", said Steven Broad, executive director of TRAFFIC.

Vietnam meanwhile has emerged as a top consumer country of rhino horn due to "out-of-control creative marketing" including as a hangover

cure and medicine, he added.

"There seems to be a denial that this is really happening and a lack of action, particularly from the Vietnamese government, in addressing that," Broad said.

The conservationists urged Thailand to ban all ivory sales, saying criminals were exploiting legal loopholes to sell illegal African ivory in Thai shops, often to unwitting foreign tourists.

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APA citation: Wildlife groups urge sanctions for ivory offenders (2013, February 21) retrieved 14 November 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-02-wildlife-groups-urge-sanctions-ivory.html>

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