

Thai ivory boom 'fuelling Africa elephant crisis'

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Confiscated elephant tusks displayed during a press conference at the customs office in Bangkok on August 30, 2013

Thailand's "out of control" ivory market is driving Africa's elephant poaching crisis, conservationists warned Wednesday, accusing the kingdom of backsliding on its pledges.

The number of [ivory](#) products on sale in Bangkok nearly trebled from

5,865 in January last year to 14,512 in May 2014, according to the wildlife group TRAFFIC.

The Southeast Asian nation, a known hub for the illegal trade in tusks from Africa, has come under pressure to ban the sale of ivory from domestic elephants.

This legal trade is blamed for easing the smuggling of ivory into Thailand from other countries, most of which is made into ornaments or taken to China and Vietnam where tusks are used in traditional medicine.

In a report released Wednesday, TRAFFIC said the amount of ivory on sale in Bangkok could not have come from Thai elephants alone.

"Thailand's efforts to regulate local ivory markets have failed... their nation's ivory markets continue to be out of control and fuel the current African elephant poaching crisis," said TRAFFIC's Naomi Doak.

The number of shops selling ivory products in Bangkok also rose from 61 to 105 between January and December last year, the group said, with Doak estimating that up to 80 percent of the ivory in Bangkok was sourced from outside Thailand.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has warned of industrial-scale poaching to meet demand for ivory in Thailand and China, with more than 20,000 African elephants poached in 2013 alone for their tusks.

Thailand agreed to implement an action plan to tackle the problem during a CITES meeting in Bangkok last year, including better regulation of ivory sellers and adding African elephants to its list of protected species.

But Doak said the timeline for the plan was too long. She called on Thai authorities to suspend domestic sales of ivory until "enforcement agencies are given the power to effectively enforce the law".

Theerapat Prayurasiddhi, deputy director general of Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, said the kingdom was trying to control the trade, adding that conservationists should also focus on where the illegal trade originates.

"When we can have better control, the trade will be more strict and [illegal trade](#) will decrease," he said.

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