

Ethiopia torches ivory stock, vows 'zero tolerance' to poachers

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Jewelry and artifacts made of ivory weighing more than six tons in total are burnt outside Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa on March 20, 2015

Ethiopia on Friday torched a six-tonne pile of seized elephant ivory, the country's entire stock, vowing a "zero tolerance" policy towards poachers and traffickers.

The torching of the seized stock, which included huge tusks, elaborate

carvings, necklaces and bracelets, came two weeks after neighbouring Kenya made a similar gesture aimed at demonstrating renewed commitment to protect Africa's iconic but dwindling elephant population.

"The message we're sending is that we have zero tolerance for poaching and illegal trafficking. We are trying to save the [elephants](#) from extinction. This is part of that. We have to act rather than talk," said Dawud Mume Ali, director of the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority.

Officials said the stock had been accumulated over the past 20 years, and came from elephants slaughtered in Ethiopia or seized at Addis Ababa's international airport—and represented a black market value of roughly 12 million dollars.

Ethiopia's own elephant population has collapsed during that period, and the most recent estimate puts the population today at just 1,800 animals—with poaching driven mainly by demand in booming Asian economies, especially China.

Some of the [ivory](#) burned on Friday included Buddha carvings.

"From the 1980's, the [elephant population](#) in Ethiopia has decreased by 90 percent. The Ethiopian Wildlife Authority is trying to minimise illegal poaching, but much has to be done," said Zeleke Tigabe of the African Wildlife Foundation.

Ian Crag of Stop Ivory said the aim of the ceremonial burnings was to make ivory be seen as worthless.

"This is a rising tide. More and more African countries are recognising that sitting on ivory stockpiles is not sitting on Fort Knox. We want it to

have no value. To be worthless. Elephants need to be worth money alive into national economies not through the export of their ivory," he said.

"This is just a piece of a dead body. This is not a piece of art."

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