

Hong Kong to ban ivory trade: leader

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Seized ivory tusks are displayed prior to their destruction by incineration in Hong Kong on May 15, 2014

Hong Kong will ban the import and export of ivory, the city's leader announced Wednesday, in a "historic" move hailed by animal welfare activists.

Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying told lawmakers in his annual policy address that officials were determined to crack down on the [trade](#) in Hong Kong.

The southern Chinese city is a major hub of ivory sales and has been criticised by environmentalists for fuelling the [illegal trade](#) that leads to rampant poaching across Africa.

"The government is very concerned about the illegal poaching of [elephants](#) in Africa. It will kick start legislative procedures as soon as possible to ban the import and export of elephant hunting trophies," Leung said at the Legislative Council on Wednesday.

He added ministers will "actively explore other appropriate measures" to phase out the local ivory trade.

But he did not specify when the ban would be put in place.

Hong Kong has one of the busiest container terminals and airports in the world and often seizes ivory traded without authorisation. Ivory seizures reached a record 8,041 kilogrammes in 2013.

The announcement was warmly welcomed by [animal welfare](#) activists—but they urged new laws to be implemented as soon as possible.



Hong Kong Secretary for the Environment Wong Kam-sing (2nd right) inspects seized ivory on display on May 15, 2014

Alex Hofford from conservation group WildAid told AFP: "We are delighted that the Hong Kong government has finally announced that they will start to phase out the local ivory trade."

He added: "We're now urging the [chief executive](#) to set a timeline and follow through with concrete action as soon as possible."

Elephant tusks are used in traditional medicine and to make ornaments with demand high in Asia and the Middle East.

Ivory is also popular with Chinese collectors who see it as a valuable investment.



Chinese actress Li Bingbing at a press event in Hong Kong on October 23, 2015 after WildAid called on the Hong Kong government to ban the sale of ivory

'Historic step'

A report by advocacy group Save the Elephants published in July said Hong Kong's ivory market is helping push elephants towards extinction.

"History has shown that legal ivory sales only serve to provide a cover for illegal trade, which fuels the rampant poaching we see across Africa. Hong Kong has always been the epicentre of that trade," Peter Knights of WildAid said in a statement, describing the announcement as a "historic step".

Knights added the end of the trade "may be in sight" with prices falling

in China, a key market.

According to official figures, 242 tonnes of ivory were sold in Hong Kong between 1990 and 2008, an average of around 13 tonnes a year. Since 2010, recorded sales have slowed to just a tonne a year.

China accounts for 70 percent of world demand for ivory, according to wildlife NGOs. They say China's zeal for ivory is responsible for the death of 30,000 African elephants each year.

There are now an estimated 470,000 African elephants living in the wild, compared to 550,000 in 2006, said the NGO Elephants Without Borders.

The international trade in elephant [ivory](#), with rare exceptions, has been outlawed since 1989 after populations of the African giants dropped from millions in the mid-20th century to some 600,000 by the end of the 1980s.

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