

Kenya demands total ivory ban to stop elephant slaughter

April 29 2016, by François Ausseil



Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) personnel and soldiers stack elephant tusks onto pyres in preparation for a historic destruction of illegal ivory and rhino-horns

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta on Friday demanded a total ban on trade in ivory to end trafficking and prevent the extinction of elephants in the wild.

"To lose our elephants would be to lose a key part of the heritage that we hold in trust. Quite simply, we will not allow it," Kenyatta said in the keynote speech at a meeting which groups African heads of state and conservationists to boost awareness of the threat of poaching.

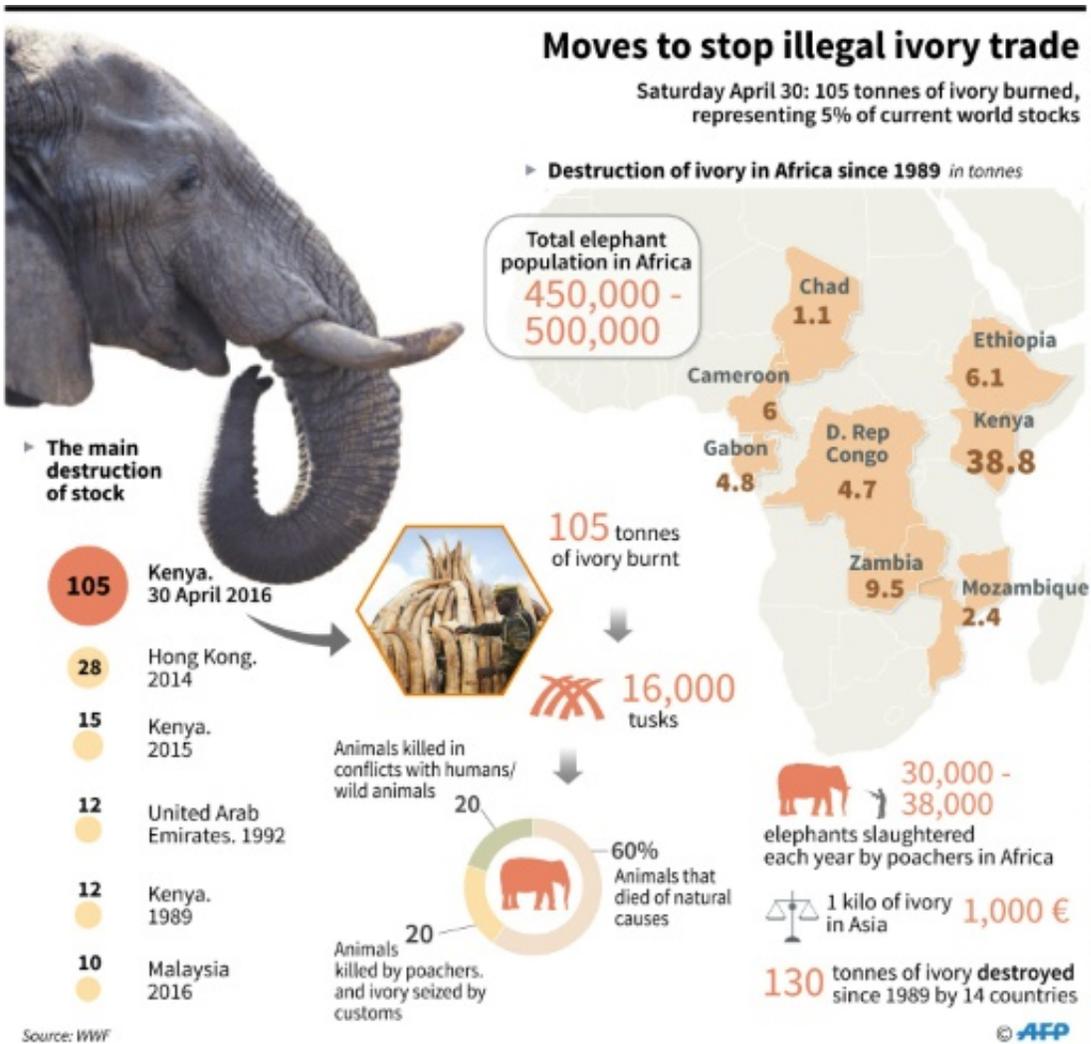
"We will not be the Africans who stood by as we lost our elephants."

Africa is home to between 450,000 to 500,000 elephants, but more than 30,000 are killed every year on the continent to satisfy demand for ivory in Asia, where raw tusks sell for around \$1,000 (800 euros) a kilo (2.2 pounds).

"The future of African elephant and rhino is far from secure, so long as the demand for their products continues to exist," Kenyatta added, speaking one day before he is to set fire to Kenya's nearly entire ivory stockpile.

"Any sale of [elephant ivory](#) and rhino horn including within legal domestic markets is inherently likely to increase the risk to our elephant and rhino populations," he added.

The bonfire will be the largest-ever torching of ivory, involving 105 tonnes from thousands of dead elephants, dwarfing by seven times any stockpile burned before. Another 1.35 tonnes of rhino horn will also be burned.



Kenya prepares to burn its ivory stockpile

'Iconic totem'

It is a grand statement: on the black market, that quantity of ivory could sell for over \$100 million (88 million euros), and the rhino horn could raise as much as \$80 million (70 million euros).

Rhino horn can fetch as much as \$60,000 per kilo, more than gold or cocaine.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) banned the [ivory trade](#) in 1989.



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Activists say destroying the stocks will help put anti-trafficking efforts at the top of the agenda at the next CITES conference.

China, which has tightened its laws on ivory imports, allows the resale of ivory bought before the 1989 ban, but activists say the trade in legal ivory acts as a cover for illegal imports and call for a complete ban on sales.

Kenyatta said he will lead calls for a "total ban on the trade of elephant ivory" at the CITES conference in South Africa in September.

"This will ensure Africa's elephant are accorded the highest possible level of protection," he said.



Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta arrives at the opening session of the anti-poaching Giants Club Summit in Nanyuki on April 29, 2016

The summit, in the central Kenyan town of Nanyuki, has highlighted the multiple methods used in the fight against poachers, from the frontline—where armed rangers combat poachers—to the court room.

President Yoweri Museveni from neighbouring Uganda said he had also taken a tough line against poachers.

"We are very strict," Museveni said. "We send them to heaven prematurely."

President Ali Bongo from Gabon, spoke of the "massacre" of forest elephants in central Africa. "Unless we take action now we risk losing this iconic totem from large swathes of our continent," he said.



Around 16,000 tusks will be set alight in a huge symbolic blaze aimed at sending a strong message about the danger of ivory poaching

'Poaching wave'

In Kenya, the combined efforts of government and private game reserves have helped cut poaching, with the number of elephants killed in 2015

down to 93 from 164 the previous year.

In the Ol Pejeta private reserve near Nanyuki, a rapid response team of armed rangers who travel by helicopter has been hard at work since 2011.

Equipped with night vision gear, encrypted radio communications, guns and sniffer dogs, and trained by British ex-special forces, the teams have helped slash poaching.



A rapid response team of armed rangers in the Ol Pejeta private reserve travel by helicopter to track down poachers

While the military-style approach is effective, it costs up to \$2 million a year.

Kenya is also trying to boost prosecution efforts, with five major cases against traffickers currently in court in the port city of Mombasa—a key point on the smuggling route to Asia, according to Space for Giants' legal expert Shamini Janyanathan.

But in a country plagued by corruption, the conviction of key figures involved in poaching and smuggling remains rare.

Max Graham, head of the Space for Giants conservation group which helped organise the meeting, notes that anti-poaching efforts is only one part of the response, and that cutting the demand is the "ultimate solution."



Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS) personnel offload elephant tusks from storage containers in Nairobi, ready to be burned

In the meantime, protecting [elephants](#) means they won't be wiped out before the demand can be stopped.

"The challenge is we don't know how long it's going to take for that demand to drop off. Is it one year, is it five years? So what we need in the interim is a holding position," Graham said.

"It means once this poaching wave has passed, once the demand for [ivory](#) and rhine horn has passed, we still have reservoirs for these magnificent animals".

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