

Britain to ban ivory sales

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Britain will ban sales of ivory in a bid to help preserve the world's dwindling elephant population, the government announced Tuesday.

The ban covers [ivory](#) items of all ages, with an unlimited fine or five years in jail the maximum penalty for breaching the ban.

The decision, which must be approved by parliament, comes after a consultation in which 88 percent of the 70,000 respondents were in favour of such a ban.

"Ivory should never be seen as a commodity for financial gain or a status symbol, so we will introduce one of the world's toughest bans on ivory sales to protect [elephants](#) for future generations," Environment Secretary Michael Gove said.

"The ban on ivory sales we will bring into law will reaffirm the UK's global leadership on this critical issue, demonstrating our belief that the abhorrent ivory [trade](#) should become a thing of the past."

Britain said the international illegal wildlife trade

was estimated to be worth up to £17 billion (\$24 billion, 19.5 billion euros).

The number of elephants has declined by almost a third in the last decade and around 20,000 a year are still being slaughtered due to the global demand for ivory, it added.

Commercial trade in raw ivory is already illegal in Britain.

The incoming ban has some exemptions: items with less than 10 percent ivory made prior to 1947; musical instruments with less than 20 percent ivory made before 1975, and portrait miniatures painted on thin slivers of ivory and which are at least 100 years old.

Commercial activities between accredited museums are also exempt, while exemption permits can be sought for items more than a century old assessed as being among the rarest of their type.

The ban was welcomed by non-governmental organisations.

Charlie Mayhew, chief executive of the Tusk Trust charity, said it was a "clear message to the world that the [illegal wildlife trade](#) will not be tolerated and every effort will be made to halt the shocking decline in Africa's [elephant population](#) in recent years".

World Wildlife Fund chief executive Tanya Steele said around 55 African elephants were being killed for their ivory every day.

"If we want to stop the poaching of this majestic animal, we need global action," she added.

"We hope the UK will continue to press countries where the biggest ivory markets are, most of which are in Asia, to shut down their trade too."

Matthew Hatchwell, conservation director at the

Zoological Society of London, said: "No one in the UK today would dream of wearing a tiger-skin coat. Thanks to this move, in a few years' time we believe the same will be true for the trade in ivory."

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