



UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



**Wildlife
Conservation
Society**



**WORLD
WILDLIFE DAY**
3 MARCH



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EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking

Lessons Learned, Challenges, and Opportunities

Virtual High-Profile Dialogue

3 March 2022

INTRODUCTION

Wildlife trafficking has become one of the most lucrative criminal activities and constitutes one of the most immediate threats to biodiversity in many parts of the world. Around the globe, wildlife is being bought and sold on an increasingly massive scale as pets, food, medicine, furs, feathers, skins, decorations, and trinkets. The European Union has an important role to play in addressing wildlife trafficking, as it constitutes a significant destination market, a hub for trafficking in transit to other parts of the world, as well as the source region for illegal trade in some species.

In addition to harming wildlife species, wildlife trafficking undermines local livelihoods and weakens impoverished rural economies further. As highlighted by the 2019 DG International Partnerships' study on the interaction between security and wildlife conservation in sub-Saharan Africa¹, wildlife trafficking weakens the rule of law, exacerbates corruption, triggers conflicts, funds organised crime syndicates, and in some cases contributes to migration flows.



¹ Study on the Interaction between Security and wildlife Conservation in Sub-Saharan Africa (2019), European Commission: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/53ed0515-de76-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

In February 2016, the European Commission adopted an **EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking**² within the EU and to strengthen the EU's role in the global fight against these illegal activities, which is currently under review. It is timely to discuss what has been achieved to date and what the EU can still do further, particularly as a contribution to a new EU Action Plan.

Organised by the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime** (UNODC) and the **Wildlife Conservation Society** (WCS), this virtual dialogue presented lessons learned and discuss challenges and opportunities for a renewed EU Action Plan to tackle wildlife trafficking, including how the EU can support the fight against wildlife trafficking in the field in partner countries.

This virtual dialogue brought together actors from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the EU, from governments, intergovernmental Organizations, civil society, and academia sharing local, national, and international-level experiences.



² EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking (COM(2016) 87 final), European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/WAP_EN_WEB.PDF

INTRODUCTORY HIGH-LEVEL PANEL

Moderator

Mr. Jorge Rios, Chief of UNODC Global Wildlife and Forest Crime Programme, opened the conference, set the scene, and introduced the first distinguished speakers.

Mr. Virginijus Sinkevičius, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, highlighted the progress made so far with the 2016 Action Plan. Back in December, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a new Directive on Environmental Crime, which clarifies sanctions, strengthens the enforcement team, and does more to recognize the role of the civil society. The EU has also been very active at the international level. In recent years, the EU has made major investments in the protection of biodiversity, anti-poaching and anti-trafficking efforts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In December last year, the European Commission took strong action against elephant poaching in Africa, with further restrictions on ivory trade in and from the EU. These new measures will ban most forms of the EU trade in ivory, finally consigning it to the past. Looking to the future and preparations for the Conference of Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to be held in Panama in November, the EU has been playing a proactive role. The EU is developing proposals to extend CITES to new species threatened by international trade, including several marine species and tropical timber. Commissioner Sinkevičius stated that Europe is determined to do more. The ongoing evaluation and revision of the EU Wildlife Action Plan is an opportunity to ensure that the fight against wildlife trafficking becomes a priority for the longer term. To conclude, he thanked both the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the Wildlife Conservation Society

for their commitment to fighting wildlife trafficking and for sharing their expertise, further emphasising we have everything to gain from closer cooperation as we work to tackle one of the major scourges of our time.

Ms. Hilde Vautmans, Member of the European Parliament and Chairwoman of MEPs for Wildlife, stated that World Wildlife Day is one of her favourite international days of the United Nations. A day where we celebrate our incredible wildlife and nature, but also a day where we raise awareness for the challenges that we are facing today. She re-emphasized that wildlife trafficking constitutes one of the most immediate threats to biodiversity. Ms. Vautmans added that wildlife crime, or the illegal wildlife trade (IWT), does not stop at our borders and that Europe remains one of the main destinations transit and source regions for illegal wildlife products. According to Ms. Vautmans, the existing measures are not enough, and there is still a lot to be done. She noted that maybe even more important than new legislation is the full implementation of the 32 measures from the EU Action Plan. As Chairwoman of MEPs for Wildlife, this will be one of her main priorities. According to her, it is critical to address wildlife trafficking at the European level. Ms. Vautmans concluded by saying that it is our duty to respect and mostly protect our impressive and incredible wildlife and nature.

Mr. Jean-Philippe Lecouffe, Deputy Executive Director at EUROPOL, stated that wildlife trafficking has been a priority for the EU and EUROPOL for many years and it will continue to be under the EU Policy Cycle EMPACT 2022+. Mr. Lecouffe stressed that the EU remains a very important location for wildlife crime and a very lucrative business. Traffickers are increasingly targeting endemic European species such as the European eel for example, the trade of which generates approximately 2.5 billion EUR annually. EUROPOL has

supported a number of operational actions by EU Member States and international partners on trafficking of commodities including ivory, timber, reptiles, and glass eels. Mr. Lecouffe described how EUROPOL coordinates Operation Lake, an annual Europe-wide operation targeting the trafficking of glass eels. In 2021, the operation involved authorities in 24 European States and resulted in 58,000 inspections across Europe, 52 arrests, as well as the seizure of over 1 million EUR worth of glass eels. Mr. Lecouffe highlighted the need to increase our engagement particularly in four areas: document fraud; the digital domain; financial investigations; and international cooperation. He concluded by saying that EUROPOL's aim is to strengthen international partnerships and outreach to address this crime.

PANEL 1 – LARGER THAN TIGERS: FIRST LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Moderator

Mr. Jorge Rios, Chief of UNODC Global Wildlife and Forest Crime Programme, introduced the first panel and presented the speakers.

Mr. Jorge Rodriguez Romero, Deputy Head of Unit, Multilateral Environmental Cooperation, DG ENV, European Commission, provided an overview of the EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking. He began by stating that the 2016-2020 EU Action Plan sets out a roadmap for the EU strategy against wildlife trafficking. As a key deliverable of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which contributes to achieving the European Green Deal's objectives, its

ongoing evaluation and forthcoming revision aim to further increase the effectiveness of EU policy and actions against wildlife trafficking, and ultimately reduce levels of wildlife trafficking globally and in the EU. Mr. Romero outlined the key positive outcomes of the previous Action Plan, namely raising the profile of wildlife trafficking, more enforcement measures, increased EU funding, strong EU proposals, a ban on EU ivory trade, and the mobilisation of diplomatic networks in many third countries. Yet, some challenges persist, such as trading routes and species concerned changing over time, connections between wildlife trade and the spread of zoonotic diseases, the impact of wildlife trafficking on local communities, increasing online trade and related use of small-parcel services, and a lack of capacity in multiple agencies. Mr. Romero concluded with an explanation of the ongoing evaluation and forthcoming revision of the Action Plan. Building on the public and expert consultations carried out so far, a Stakeholder Workshop with experts will be held on 16 March 2022 to support the revision process. The adoption and publication of a revised Action Plan and a Staff Working Document on the evaluation is expected during the third quarter of 2022.

Ms. Diana Pérez-Aranda Serrano, Spanish Action Plan against illegal trafficking and international poaching of wildlife species at the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge of Spain, stated that, in 2018, Spain became the first EU Member State to adapt the '*EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking*' to its national context through the approval of the '*Spanish Action Plan against illegal trafficking and international poaching of wildlife species*'³.

³ Plan TIFIES, for its Spanish acronym.

This Plan represents the commitment of the Government of Spain to tackle this crime. The Plan includes actions at the national level, but also in third countries of origin of poaching. The approval of the Plan TIFIES has represented a significant boost for the fight against wildlife trafficking in Spain, especially through the actions raised from the collaboration between the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO), and the Civil Guard's Nature Protection Service (SEPRONA) in terms of raising capacities for agents, logistical support for police operations, carrying out lab analyzes and expert reports, creation of structures for a better coordination among different competent bodies, among others. Ms. Pérez-Aranda Serrano presented different examples of this fruitful collaboration between the administration with competences in the environment, MITECO, and the administration with competences in the prosecution and investigation of environmental crime, SEPRONA, which according to Ms. Serrano could be a reference model of synergic work to be exported to other countries.

Ms. Olga Kuzmianok, ICCWC Partnership, UNODC Global Wildlife and Forest Crime (WLFC) Programme, discussed the importance of international cooperation and partnerships. She noted that international cooperation, be it formal or informal, is the only way to sustainably disrupt criminal networks involved in the trafficking of wild fauna and flora, including animals, birds and fish and their products. With the goal of fostering international cooperation, in 2010, five inter-governmental organizations- UNODC, CITES, International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the World Customs Organization, and the World Bank-

formed the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) with the mission to strengthen criminal justice systems and to provide coordinated support to Member States at the national and international levels. ICCWC work has focused on building knowledge about the modus operandi and national needs to address wildlife and forest crime by conducting assessments through flagship WLFC Analytic Toolkit and Indicator Framework developed by the consortium. The EU Action Plan makes a specific mention of these tools- and ICCWC has now implemented them in over 30 countries. The Action Plan is dedicated to increasing international cooperation. Over the last 6 years, ICCWC partners have assisted more than 40 states, and the specialized support to law enforcement has resulted in the increase of operations, apprehension of over 2000 offenders, countless seizures and dismantling of several criminal networks. This work has demonstrated that a strong commitment to international cooperation in the end yields positive results. ICCWC has contributed to the increase in quality prosecutions with deterrent sentencing. However, while the profits continue to be generated from wildlife trafficking, every effort is needed to continue making wildlife and timber trafficking unattractive and a difficult business for criminals. The cross-border challenges make it incumbent upon us to continue working together across borders and continents. Later this year, ICCWC will launch Vision 2030 to end wildlife crime and looks forward to continuing to work with Member States to address this challenge in cooperation with the EU, European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), and civil society organisations.

Mr. Arnaud Goessens, Associate Director for EU Policy at the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS EU), noted the importance of addressing the entire wildlife trafficking supply chain from source, to transit, to consumer countries, as well as the need to avoid operating in silos. Only tangible initiatives that address wildlife trafficking in a holistic manner will result in long-term success. At the level of consumer countries, efforts should focus on scientific and evidence-based behaviour change initiatives to effectively reduce demand for illegal wildlife, with particular attention to Asia where the demand is extremely high. Mr. Goessens noted that the EU is also an important destination market for illegal wildlife. A further crucial action he highlighted, would be the adoption of new EU regulations that ensure that non-CITES-listed species that are illegally taken from the wild in third countries are also prohibited in the EU, which would close a significant loophole in the EU wildlife trade regulations. Regarding transit countries, efforts should focus on cooperation with the private sector, including the transport industry, online platforms, and the finance sector, which all have a key role in detecting and combatting wildlife trafficking. At the very beginning of the supply chain in source countries, significant increased long-term EU financial and technical support is needed for local authorities and local communities to further develop and strengthen their capacity in protecting their environment and wildlife. He noted that European Commission President von der Leyen announced in September 2021 that the EU will double its funding for biodiversity globally. It would be important to see this doubling in funding

⁴ In January 2021, the European Commission's Directorate for Cooperation and Development (DG

also translated in addressing wildlife trafficking in partner countries and could be allocated, for instance, to implement the recommendations of the reports '*Larger than elephants*', '*Larger than tigers*' and '*Larger than jaguars*' and the findings of the aforementioned study on security and wildlife trafficking, which were all commissioned by DG International Partnerships⁴, said Mr. Goessens. Lastly, he recalled that wildlife trafficking is a global issue that needs to be further addressed at the global level, through multilateral fora such as CITES and through, for example, the development of an additional protocol specifically on wildlife and forest crime under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC).

PANEL 2 – STRATEGIC AREAS TO ADDRESS WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING GLOBALLY

Moderator

Prof. Dr. Tanya Wyatt, Professor of Criminology at Northumbria University, UK, introduced the second panel and presented the speakers.

Mr. Giovanni Broussard, Regional Coordinator of the UNODC Global Wildlife and Forest Crime Programme for South, South East Asia and the Pacific, highlighted that through the EU Action Plan, the EU became a much stronger stakeholder in the field of IWT in Southeast Asia. In particular some of the EU projects – including the ones implemented by UNODC – contributed to

DEVCO) was renamed into the Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA).

move the emphasis of the response to IWT from a regulatory approach to a criminal justice approach. As a result, there were several efforts to build capacities to investigate wildlife crime as a form of organized crime, with emphasis on more advanced techniques including online investigations, financial investigations, anti-corruption and controlled deliveries. It is difficult to identify truly successful global initiatives in the fight against IWT, however the extent of cooperation among law enforcement agencies has been slowly but surely growing over the past 5 years. There have been a few good examples of successful cooperation that led to convictions of criminals beyond the emphasis on seizures. Some of the authorities in China have become very active players in terms of cooperation within Asia and beyond. Another interesting development is represented by the support of the EU to an effort to expand the understanding of the link between wildlife crime and future zoonotic diseases, said Mr. Broussard.

Ms. Leah W. Naess, Senior Policy Officer, Directorate of Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy at the African Union (AU) Commission, emphasized that addressing corruption is critical to be able to disrupt poaching and trafficking in wildlife. Regarding political commitments, the AU encourages Member States to ratify, domesticate, and implement regional international agreements such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), and CITES, among others, that aim at addressing corruption. Ms. Naess highlighted that an AU Advisory board on addressing corruption has been established

and that the AU Commission encourages implementation of the governance programmes to address corruption in the natural resource sector and promote integrity. Ms. Naess noted that the COVID-19 has deeply affected communities who depend on wild fauna and flora around protected areas. She further explained that communities are a critical source of information related to IWT- they know which people are corrupt, who are involved in poaching etc. Inclusive governance and involving communities in decision making processes will contribute to addressing corruption, poaching, and trafficking. Ms. Naess concluded that there is a need for communities to benefit from protected areas, have alternative sources of livelihood, and be provided with training, capacity building opportunities on advocacy and awareness.

Ms. Yovana Murillo, Program Manager for Counter Wildlife Trafficking in Andes - Amazon - Orinoco, WCS, highlighted that the Andean-Amazon countries are home to an unparalleled biological and cultural diversity; however, this diversity faces a growing threat. Ms. Murillo explained that the Alliance for Wildlife and Forest seeks to improve the understanding of the dynamics of wildlife and timber trafficking, to develop collaboration mechanisms between civil society and governments, and to engage civil society in Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and two Brazilian states. The Alliance has already generated different reports that describe IWT issues in the region, such as national diagnostic reports, a legal analysis of legal framework on IWT, regional diagnosis in border areas, and online wildlife trade. The Alliance provides technical assistance in developing collaboration mechanisms between government agencies

and building combat IWT national strategies. The Alliance also supports the further strengthening of law enforcement capacities and technology use. Finally, the Alliance implements demand reduction actions through communication campaigns and behavior change strategies. As a key challenge, Ms. Murillo stressed that IWT is still not considered a serious crime in all countries, receiving insufficient political attention, and resulting in a low number of prosecutions. The lack of available and accessible data and insufficient information sharing mechanisms also hinder effective actions.

Prof. Dr. Tien Ming Lee, Oxford Martin Visiting Fellow on the Illegal Wildlife Trade, University of Oxford, and Professor at the Schools of Life Sciences and Ecology, Sun Yat-sen University, presented his work on behavioral science as part of the EU-funded project on *'Disrupting illicit supply chains of wildlife in Asia by leveraging civil society partnerships to increase the effectiveness of Government action'*. Sun Yat-sen University partners with WCS to deliver on the fourth section of this multi-million Euros project that aims to reduce preference for illegally sourced products for the products of target species such as Asian elephant, tiger, and freshwater turtles among the Chinese consumers. The established interdisciplinary research Behavioral Insights Unit works to first understand self-reported consumption and its complex drivers, working with multi-stakeholders (e.g., Government, Institutions). Through this initiative, researchers design, trial and evaluate the

impacts of behavioral interventions (e.g., campaigns). The final goal is to scale up interventions and test for their effectiveness. We hope that we can develop a science-based, evidence-based guide for future behavioral interventions to reduce the demand for illegal wildlife products in this and other regions of the world.

Ms. Maria Socorro Manguiat, Senior Legal Officer, Law Division at the UN Environment Programme, highlighted that to ensure that global frameworks are effective in wildlife trafficking, we must recall that these frameworks regulate both legal trade and illegal trade in wildlife. It is important to talk of both legally binding and non-legally binding instruments, which are complementary. Ms. Manguiat emphasised that the focus should not only be on natural resources management, but also on trade regulation and crime prevention, and criminal justice. According to her, we need to bring together those who implement the different instruments within these spaces. Laws should include provisions on international cooperation, including international law enforcement cooperation mechanisms such as mutual legal assistance. There also needs to be more investment in data collection and monitoring and tracking systems. As regards demand reduction, increasing awareness does not necessarily result in a change of behavior. For behavioral change to occur, we have to define a specific target audience. Investment into the research to define that audience and the intervention is required, concluded Ms. Manguiat.

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