

Forum:	General Assembly Second Committee
Issue:	The Question of Tackling Poaching and the Illegal Trade of Wildlife Products
Student Officer:	Lili-Anna Papadopoulos
Position:	Vice President of the General Assembly Second Committee

Introduction

The poaching and illegal trade of wildlife products has become an issue not to be taken lightly. Even though it is vastly recognized as a substantial issue, many do not view it as such. In certain places in the world, wildlife trade is particularly threatening. These areas have been labeled as “wildlife trade hotspots”¹, which include China’s international borders, trade hubs in Africa and Southeast Asia, the eastern borders of the European Union and many others. Illegal wildlife trade and poaching are vital threats to many species if nothing is done about them. These acts interrupt nature, kill targeted and non-targeted species, as well as on occasion cause invasive species to be introduced to areas where they do not belong and where they are a threat to the balance of nature.

Definition of Key Terms

Poaching^{2, 3, 4}

Poaching can be defined as the trafficking and killing of wildlife. An example of poaching is hunting tigers for their skins and bones. In countries such as Vietnam, where a myth that rhino horns can cure cancer spread, there has been demand for the product. This has led to immense poaching of rhinos in South Africa. Because of poaching, three of five species of rhinos are on the lists of the most endangered animals of the year.

Wildlife products^{5, 6}

¹WWF [Threats - Illegal Wildlife Trade](#)

²WWF [What is poaching?](#)

³National Geographic [Poaching](#)

⁴EARTH.ORG [Endangered species of 2022](#)

⁵UN environment [Wildlife product](#)

⁶Merriam-Webster [Wildlife](#)

Wildlife products are easily recognizable parts of, or products obtained from, a wild species, for example elephant ivory and corals. Wildlife includes all living things that are not human or domesticated, meaning that products taken from anything under the category are wildlife products.

Illegal trade^{7, 8}

Illegal wildlife trade is an urgent issue because of its wide endangerment of wildlife. The issue does not only affect wildlife, since illegal wildlife trade is a massive form of international organized crime. Illegal trade of wildlife affects animals, the people working and living alongside them, as well as the economic progress of some of the poorest countries in the world. Illegal trade of wildlife products is not to be mixed with the legal side of the industry. There are of course natural products, which can be traded sustainably and legally, which is how many individuals in poorer countries make their living.

Trade hubs

According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), globally 72-90% of wildlife products are trafficked by sea. This is done by using places such as container ports for wildlife smuggling operations.⁹ As defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, a trade hub is a place where goods from other places are bought and sold.¹⁰ Though trade hubs can be legal, in the case of illegal wildlife trade, they are used to smuggle illegal wildlife products. Airports, loading docs, container ports, and many more are used as hubs for illegal trade, since traffickers use passenger flights as well as hide wildlife in cargo which is loaded onto planes and ships.¹¹

Explanation of the Question

Tackling poaching and the illegal trade of wildlife products can be a demanding issue. The legal trade of wildlife has been regulated by the United Nations' (UN) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)¹², which was signed in Washington DC, the United States of America (USA) on the 3rd of March, 1973. CITES is an international agreement, which was made to make sure that international trade in animals and plants will not threaten their well being and survival in the wild. The Convention has 183 parties¹³, meaning all member states of the United Nations are party to the treaty, short by ten. The ten states not involved are: the Democratic People's

⁷ WWF [Why we're tackling the illegal wildlife trade](#)

⁸ TRAFFIC [Legal wildlife trade](#)

⁹ WWF [Asia-pacific counter-illegal wildlife trade hub](#)

¹⁰ Cambridge Dictionary [Trading hub](#)

¹¹ ROUTES (Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species) [Wildlife Trafficking](#)

¹² CITES [What is CITES?](#)

¹³ YMPÄRISTÖ.fi [International trade of endangered species](#)

Republic (DPR) of Korea, Federated States of Micronesia, Haiti, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, South Sudan, East Timor, Turkmenistan and Tuvalu.¹⁴

Where does the problem occur?

Data released by WWF has shown that illegal wildlife trafficking occurs in nearly 30% of the wildlife-inhabited areas of the world.¹⁵ Large populations of rare plant and animal species are supported by Natural World Heritage sites across the globe. These include 40% of African elephants and almost a third of the world's remaining tigers. Although the sites are recognized for their value, a WWF report¹⁶ has found that illegal poaching, logging and fishing still occur in close to 30% of natural and mixed World Heritage sites. As mentioned before some of the wildlife trade hotspots include Chinese borders, Southeast Asia, Africa and Eastern European borders. As can be seen from the map, wildlife crime happens all around the world. It can also be noticed that there are some more centered and specific parts with more crime than others.



A Foreign Policy map of global wildlife crime from 2015.¹⁷ A dot represents a location relating to any form of wildlife crime.

Who does it affect?

¹⁴ CITES [List of Contracting Parties](#)

¹⁵ WWF [Wildlife Trafficking Occurs in Nearly 30 Percent of World's Most Protected Areas](#)

¹⁶ WWF [Report - Halting the illegal trade of CITES species from World Heritage Sites](#)

¹⁷ MONGABAY [Wildlife crime map](#)

According to the International Fund for Animal Welfare¹⁸, 6000 species of wildlife were seized between 1999 and 2008. And at least 1000 park rangers have been killed in the line of duty in the past decade. According to an article in World Elephant Day, an estimated 100 African Elephants are killed each day.¹⁹ Poaching does not just affect individual animals, but destroys the lives of their offspring and ecosystems.²⁰ Since illegal wildlife trade undermines legal trade, it has a devastating effect on local economies.

Key Member States and NGOs Involved and Their Views

China

The demand and price for products from endangered species have gone uphill in China throughout the past years. A UN Charter about the issue²¹ states that the rising demand for rare animal parts comes from them being used as ingredients in tonics, as “status symbols” or investments and simply the availability and accessibility of the products in the marketplace. Although the trade of these products is banned by international and domestic laws, the ones who benefit from the trade create loopholes and exceptions. The State Council of China has banned buying, sale and use of tiger bone (tigers being one of their most poached and illegally traded animals), over twenty years ago. Despite this, large industrial tiger farms are in business, which Chinese authorities due to the commercial interest in the products, have issued licenses for as wineries and taxidermists. Because of farming tigers for their parts, the market interest for them has grown, leading to more poaching. Although much of the world's illegal wildlife trade is linked to China, the Chinese government does not support the illegal trade and poaching of wildlife products. In fact, they have issued trade bans and notices banning the use of products such as rhino horns and shark fins. China has made attempts to demonstrate its commitment to wildlife conservation, for example by confiscating and destroying ivory stockpiles and the re-interpretation of laws, which make consumption of endangered species a punishable crime.

Kenya

Poaching has a very profound effect on the East African region. According to a UN Chronicles article²² international demand for ivory and rhino horns is fuelling catastrophic declines in elephant and rhino populations. As in many other countries in Africa, in Kenya wildlife crime and poaching have evolved and present new challenges for wildlife conservation. Kenya is strongly against wildlife crimes

¹⁸ IFAW [Wildlife crime kills animals. And people.](#)

¹⁹ World Elephant Day [Why World Elephant Day?](#)

²⁰ IFAW [Wildlife Crime](#)

²¹ UN Chronicle [Will China Say No to Wildlife Trade?](#)

²² UN Chronicle [Fighting Wildlife Trade in Kenya](#)

and has worked hard to fight poaching and illegal wildlife trade. Kenya's Wildlife Services (KWS) is legally mandated to enforce Kenya's wildlife laws and regulations. This includes eliminating poaching in protected areas and reducing it as much as possible elsewhere. KWS has said that enhanced surveillance has helped animals against poaching, as well as community engagement. The director-general of KWS John Waweru said in 2019 that "in appreciation of the critical role the wildlife sector plays in national development and security, the government has enhanced its investments in anti-poaching and law enforcement operations."²³ The Kenyan government has financed research to be done to study the animals in protected areas.²⁴

India

India is the source of many trafficked wildlife and wildlife products all across the world, as well as a transit and destination country for them. In India, illegal wildlife trade includes diverse products, such as tiger and leopard claws, pangolins, turtle shells, medical plants, caged birds and many more.²⁵ India does not condone illegal poaching and wildlife trade. In fact India has implemented a strong legal and policy framework in order to regulate and restrict wildlife trade. The trade of over 1800 species of wild animals, plants and their derivatives is prohibited under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.²⁶ India has been a member of CITES since 1976. International wildlife trafficking in and out of India mainly occurs through two routes, through the international border along the Northeast and through airports.²⁷ According to a TRAFFIC report titled "In Plane Sight: Wildlife Trafficking in the Air Transport Sector"²⁸, published in 2018, the trafficking in rhino horns, tiger parts, and pangolin scales is especially out of control in the Indo-Nepal and Indo-Myanmar-China borders, with Northeast Indian cities being used as transit sites. Due to its megadiverse nature, 8% of the world's wildlife, and dense human population, India serves as a source and transit country for illegal wildlife and wildlife products. The dense human population makes tracing illegal goods very difficult after they enter the domestic market.²⁹

²³ Livekindly [How Kenya's Wildlife Poaching Dropped By 90% In 6 Years](#)

²⁴ africanews. [Kenya praises fight against poaching after animal census shows improvement](#)

²⁵ WWF India [Illegal wildlife trade in India](#)

²⁶ WCS - India [Counter Wildlife Trafficking](#)

²⁷ MONGABAY [What are the most common routes through which wild species are trafficked in India?](#)

²⁸ TRAFFIC [In Plane Sight](#)

²⁹ MONGABAY: [Why is India a major hub for wildlife trafficking?](#)



*A pangolin brought to the Range Office at Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu. Pangolin poaching has been on the rise in India.*³⁰

Vietnam

Vietnam is known for having highly diverse tropical animals and is considered to be a major hub for wildlife trafficking in Southeast Asia, as well as globally for certain highly trafficked and in demand species such as rhinoceros and tigers. According to a Global Initiative article³¹ and other sources, since 2010, Vietnamese networks abroad have been found to be involved in the poaching of at least 18 000 elephants, 111 000 pangolins and nearly 1 000 rhinoceroses. Though the numbers are large, the investigations of these cases have led to only a few prosecutions.³² This is a huge problem, because even though large scale seizures at seaports have been led, which have amounted to more than 15 tonnes of ivory and 36 tonnes of pangolin scales since 2018, none of the seaport cases have resulted in arrests or convictions. When this happens, the perpetrators are not held accountable and Vietnamese-led criminal groups continue to operate. The demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products is high in Vietnam, due to traditional medicine, consumption at restaurants, using endangered species products as status symbols and growing illegal pet trade.³³ Vietnam is against poaching and illegal wildlife trade and has strengthened its law enforcement efforts to protect wildlife. According to Vietnam's 2017 Penal Code (In effect since January 1, 2018)³⁴, criminals convicted of breaking Vietnamese laws

³⁰ MONGABAY [What species are most commonly trafficked in India?](#)

³¹ GLOBAL INITIATIVE [Vietnam's virtual landscape for illicit wildlife trading](#)

³² eia - environmental investigation agency [Vietnam's footprint in Africa](#)

³³ Global Giving [Help End the Illegal Wildlife Trade in Vietnam](#)

³⁴ env [Wildlife Law Library](#)

protecting endangered species or related to wildlife, can face imprisonment for up to 15 years and fines up to US\$660,000.³⁵

WWF

WWF is one of the most well-funded nonprofits in the environmental movement. WWF works to help communities conserve the natural resources they depend upon, transform policies and markets toward sustainability and protect as well as restore species and their habitats. In addition they raise awareness and make information about wildlife conservation and issues such as poaching and illegal wildlife trade accessible to everyone.³⁶ They are working on tackling the illegal wildlife trade and are focusing their efforts on critical areas such as supporting rangers and local communities putting who put their lives on the line protecting wildlife from poachers, exposing and closing key hot-spots and routes used to trade illegal products such as ivory, promoting initiatives to change customer behavior and the demand for illegal wildlife products and putting pressure on governments to enforce and improve their regulations to make ending illegal wildlife trade possible, once and for all.³⁷

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)

IFAW launched an advertising campaign about ivory, due to not many people knowing what it is or how it is obtained. This was apparent in China, where the word for ivory is Xiang Ya, “elephant teeth”. According to a survey run in China 7 out of 10 Chinese did not know that ivory comes from dead elephants. Because of the term, people had gotten the impression that ivory can fall out naturally, such as human teeth. IFAW is a global non-profit, working through action in over 40 countries around the world. IFAW is strongly against poaching and the illegal trade of wildlife products and they are working toward a world where people and animals can thrive together.³⁸

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
October 5, 1948	The International Union for Conservation of Nature, established ³⁹

³⁵ WILDAID [Vietnam Strengthens Law Enforcement Efforts to Protect Wildlife](#)

³⁶ WWF [About Us](#)

³⁷ WWF [Stopping the illegal wildlife trade](#)

³⁸ Give.org [Advancing Collaboration with International Fund for Animal Welfare](#)

³⁹ IUCN [Seven decades of experience](#)

March 3, 1973	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, signed
January 1, 1989	CITES creates a global ivory ban in an effort to reduce poaching and stop the decreasing number of elephant populations ⁴⁰

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The UN has created the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), in order to spread information about endangered species and their trade as well as to enforce the survival of wild animals and plants and to make sure that the trade of some of them does not threaten the well being of the species. In 2010, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and four other international bodies formed an International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime to bring together expertise from each agency to support countries in combating wildlife crimes.⁴¹

- Poaching and Illicit Wildlife Trafficking: A Multidimensional Crime and a Growing Challenge to the International Community, 26 September 2013 **(A/68/553)**⁴²
- Adoption of Resolution on Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife, 15 July 2015 **(A/69/L.80)**⁴³
- Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife, 10 September 2019 **(A/73/L.120)**⁴⁴

Possible Solutions

Closing down illegal marketplaces

Key consumer countries such as China and India, could start closing down their illegal markets. This would have a substantial impact on the illegal trade of, for example, ivory and tigers in China and pangolins and leopard products in India. The countries taking a strong stance on the issue would emphasize the gravity of the matter and set an example for other countries to follow and do the same. High profile countries taking grave measures to manage the issue would shine light to how serious the

⁴⁰ TIMETOAST [Poaching timeline](#)

⁴¹ Dag Hammarskjöld LIBRARY [How does the United Nations respond to illegal wildlife poaching and trafficking?](#)

⁴² United nations General Assembly [UN document](#)

⁴³ General Assembly [Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife](#)

⁴⁴ UN Digital Library [Downloadable resolution](#)

topic is and raise awareness in buyers who unknowingly purchase items which are or include illegal and illegally traded wildlife products, as well as the ones who do so, knowingly but may not know how serious the issue they are contributing to is. Many consumers do not know the impact the items they buy, such as tortoise hair clips or elephant ivory carvings have on poaching situations in local communities and just buy things sold to them in the markets and online.⁴⁵

Imposing fines on poachers

Imposing fines on poachers would add to how the issue is handled and may cause poachers and organizers of illegal trade to slow down on their actions. Imposing fines would slow down the market and reduce the profit margins of the illegal wildlife trade making it more difficult for poachers to continue with this unlawful activity at the risk of facing graver consequences and not enough demand for their products.

Establishing stricter surveillance

Establishing stricter surveillance, such as better border control and airport security could cut down the cycle of poached and illegally traded wildlife and wildlife products getting to their destinations. Setting better border control and investigations on the Northeast Indian borders, for example, could slow and possibly at some point cut the illegal wildlife trafficking there. Surveillance and safety measures for poaching and illegal wildlife trade should be reinforced, because many from the affected communities are making defending these illegally traded and trafficked animals their own mission and getting hurt in the process. Poachers can get violent with the animals trying to survive and escape as well as people attempting to save them. Establishing things such as daily patrols through suspected or known trade hotspots and operations to catch smugglers can go a long way in making sure the illegal wildlife numbers go down.⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ MUN Bilbao Spain Research Report [Question of: International Animal Trafficking](#)

⁴⁶ UNODC [E4J University Module Series: Wildlife Crime](#)

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