



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS  
AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS

Prepared Statement of:

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**“The Escalating International Wildlife Trafficking Crisis: Ecological,  
Economic, and National Security Issues”**

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Chairmen Coons and Cardin, Ranking Members Flake and Rubio, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittees on African Affairs and East Asian and Pacific Affairs, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the threat posed from wildlife trafficking and the efforts of the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) to address it.

I testify before you today alongside committed champions and long-time supporters of enhancing conservation efforts, improving land management, protecting endangered species, and strengthening law enforcement capacities that safeguard natural resources and prevent and prosecute environmental and wildlife trafficking crimes. And while this may be an area that INL is somewhat new to, you can rest assured that we are now much more actively engaged, taking to heart the call-to-action by both the President and Secretary of State, to leverage all instruments at our disposal to strengthen our partners' law enforcement and criminal justice capacities to combat wildlife trafficking.

Let me provide some insights into the breadth and scale of the challenge posed by the global illicit trade in wildlife. Increasing demand for illegally traded wildlife products in the last several years has fueled a massive uptick in poaching, particularly in Africa, and growing engagement by sophisticated transnational organized criminal networks, drawn to profits that can rival or in some cases even exceed those derived from drug trafficking. Conservative estimates of \$8-10 billion in illicit revenues per year place wildlife trafficking among the top five most lucrative forms of transnational organized crime. In addition to searching out opportunities for high rewards, criminals also exploit environments with low risks of detection and meaningful punishment – and they find that in the illicit wildlife trade where they are able to exploit porous borders, corrupt officials, insufficient enforcement and investigative capacities and penalties, weak legal regimes, and lax financial system oversight.

All of us need to be concerned about the wide-ranging impact of the illegal wildlife trade, and organized criminal organizations' involvement in it. I'd like to talk about the serious impact this crime has on humans and our security from INL's perspective:

- The high tech weaponry and violent, aggressive tactics now employed by poachers threaten the safety and security of civilian populations, particularly in supply (also known as “range”) states. Park rangers are at special risk and many have been killed trying to protect wildlife.

- The corruption that both fuels, and is fueled by, the illegal wildlife trade undermines good governance and the rule of law, and erodes citizens' confidence in their government institutions.
- Wildlife trafficking crimes create and exacerbate border insecurity, creating new vulnerabilities that other criminals, terrorists, and militias can exploit.
- The depletion of natural resources, and related corruption, weakens financial stability and economic growth, particularly in countries for which tourism is a major revenue source. Furthermore, illicit trade in illegally harvested marine species threatens food security, potentially undermining political stability in many developing nations.
- Terrorists and militia groups may seize the opportunity to benefit from the wildlife trade. We have some evidence that the Lord's Resistance Army and the Janjaweed have done so, for example, trading wildlife products for weapons or safe haven.

For these reasons, the President issued an Executive Order calling for a whole of government response to combat wildlife trafficking on July 1, 2013 and released the *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking* on February, 11, 2014. The Strategy calls on agencies and departments to address wildlife trafficking by: (1) strengthening domestic and global enforcement; (2) reducing demand for illegal wildlife products; and (3) building international cooperation and public-private partnerships.

INL is primarily involved in implementing the enforcement and international cooperation goals of the strategy through programmatic and diplomatic initiatives. We are not complete newcomers to the game -- for over a decade, we have provided wildlife investigative training delivered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of our International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) program. But within the last year, with strong support from Congress, we have begun to greatly expand our programs, drawing on our experience in addressing other forms of transnational criminal activity. We have organized our work around four key areas.

First, we will work with interested partners to strengthen legislative frameworks to make wildlife trafficking a serious crime with strong penalties in

order to provide investigators and prosecutors the legal tools they need to put the traffickers behind bars.

Second we will improve law enforcement and investigative capabilities – including intelligence, evidence collection and analysis, investigative skills and methods, and collaboration across agencies and governments – with our partner agencies to promote intelligence-led investigations and operations that strive not simply to pick up individual poachers but rather to better understand and begin to dismantle the organizations for which they work.

Third, we will work to build prosecutorial and judicial capacities with our partners. As we have learned, rangers and police will not continue to apprehend the bad guys if they believe prosecutors or judges will just let them go. So as we improve legislative frameworks and offer up new tools, we need to ensure prosecutors and judges know how to use those tools effectively and creatively.

And fourth, we will enhance cross-border law enforcement cooperation, particularly by working with the regional Wildlife Enforcement Networks (WENs) with other agencies. There is much that we need to learn about how wildlife trafficking organizations operate – but we do know that illegal wildlife products often make their way through multiple transit points as they move from supply states to demand markets. So we need to build alliances and processes across borders for sharing information and intelligence and collaborating on operations.

The National Strategy stresses the need to marshal and strategically apply federal resources through a coordinated approach. Our work in these areas will be done on a bilateral and regional basis looking at priority areas and landscapes for U.S. foreign assistance in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. When the President announced the Executive Order to Combat Wildlife Trafficking last July, he also announced that \$10 million would support law enforcement efforts in Africa. Those funds, coupled with approximately \$6 million in prior year funding, are supporting bilateral INL programming in Kenya and South Africa; regional capacity building efforts in Africa and East Asia and the Pacific, and global programs, including efforts through INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the World Customs Organizations, all of which are part of the International Consortium for Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC). The approximately \$15 million recently directed in FY 2014 International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) funds will enable us to expand efforts begun or piloted using prior year resources, such as training for customs

officers at ports of entry, prosecutorial training, and joint capacity building-operational exercises across regions and continents.

INL's engagement extends beyond assistance programming. We also are tapping into tools developed to address transnational organized crime, to tackle the specific challenge of wildlife trafficking, including the Transnational Organized Crime Rewards Program, which Congress authorized in 2013. In November 2013, Secretary Kerry announced the first reward offer under the program of up to \$1 million for information leading to the dismantling of the Xaysavang Network. The Xaysavang Network, based in Laos and operating across Africa and Asia, facilitates the illegal trade of endangered elephants, rhinos, and other species.

Through diplomatic outreach and engagement, we are building international consensus around the importance of dismantling wildlife trafficking networks. For example, at the U.N. Crime Commission in April 2013, the United States introduced a successful joint resolution with Peru encouraging governments around the world to treat wildlife trafficking as a "serious crime" pursuant to the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Making it a serious crime unlocks new opportunities for international law enforcement cooperation provided under the Convention, including mutual legal assistance, asset seizure and forfeiture, extradition, and other tools to hold criminals accountable for wildlife crime. The U.N. Economic and Social Council adopted the resolution in July 2013, further elevating wildlife trafficking as a major concern for the United Nations. These measures provide the mandate that we need, as members of a larger body of concerned nations, to harness our collective capabilities to learn more about these trafficking networks, share information, and collaborate on plans and programs that will undermine them.

Another early success to which we can point is a recent month-long global law enforcement cooperative effort, known as "Cobra II," that we helped to support. Participants from 28 countries, including representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with participation from USAID, executed this global operation in February 2014 to combat wildlife trafficking and poaching which resulted in more than 400 arrests and 350 major seizures of wildlife and wildlife products across Africa, Asia, and the United States. The operation demonstrated to participants the benefits and results that can be achieved by working together and we will seek to build on the positive momentum it generated.

Although we have more to learn about the links that exist between wildlife trafficking organizations and other transnational criminal groups, we do know that

wildlife traffickers do not operate in a vacuum. Criminal organizations tend to use the same routes and shipping methods as smugglers of weapons, drugs, and counterfeits. They bribe the same customs officials. They deploy poachers in the same restive regions where terrorists and other criminals may sow instability and conflict and exploit weak institutions and porous borders. Money and corruption are common denominators of all forms of transnational organized crime, and wildlife trafficking is no exception.

INL is looking at ways to connect our anti-corruption and unit vetting programs used effectively in narcotics-producing regions, to support willing governments afflicted by wildlife trafficking. We are also examining the broader use of Presidential Proclamation (PP) 7750, which is used to bar entry into the United States of high-level corrupt officials and their family members, against wildlife traffickers and their enablers.

Following the money is equally important. All illicit criminal networks need money to finance their activities and as illicit funds move through the international financial system, they can be detected and monitored. In addition to exercising leadership within the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), we are promoting and applying tools like asset recovery and forfeiture to combat transnational organized crime and money laundering. Through the FATF style regional body for Eastern and Southern Africa, we are working with international partners to uncover and counter money laundering and other illicit financial flows related to wildlife trafficking. We then will develop capacity building projects to address gaps this study identifies.

Illicit networks undercut the ability of law enforcement to protect citizens, deprive the states of vital revenues, promote corruption, and contribute to bad governance. But as organized crime has evolved and diversified, so has INL. Our programs are tailored to specific and cross cutting threats, including wildlife trafficking, to target the common facilitators of all types of crime.

Thank you, Chairman Coons, Chairman Cardin, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittees for your attention to and support of our collective efforts to combat wildlife trafficking. I welcome your questions.