



POACHING AND ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE



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POACHING



3 rhinos,
55 elephants and
190 pangolins
every day

TRAFFICKING



More than
270 metric tonnes
of ivory seized
between 2007 and 2014

DEMAND



The black market value
of rhino horn
exceeds that
of gold

An ivory carving? A medicinal remedy made from tiger bones? Or a pinch of rhino powder to relieve a headache after a long night of partying? Demand for products like these is booming, especially in Asia.

The astronomical prices paid for these products on the black market make illegal trade in endangered species extremely lucrative. Together with illegal logging and other environmental crimes, wildlife crime is the fourth largest offense in the world after trafficking in drugs, counterfeit products and people. Global revenue generated solely from the illegal sale of wildlife is estimated to be USD 9–23 billion annually.

Every year countless animals and plants fall victim to trafficking: in 2016, around 20,000 African elephants and, in South Africa alone, more than 1,000 rhinos were killed for their body parts. The pangolin is the most illegally traded mammal in the world. It is estimated that an astounding 70,000 animals have been poached every year on average for the illegal market between 2000 and 2016.

The loss of animals and biodiversity is by no means solely a nature conservation problem for the affected countries of origin. Poaching and illegal wildlife trade deprive them of their natural resources and their economic value. Studies, for example, have shown that elephants lost to poaching represent a tourism value of USD 25 million a year – revenue potentially lost for the African tourism sector. Moreover, illicit trade in wildlife is often linked to other crimes, corruption in particular. All of this undermines economic development, the rule of law and stability in many countries.

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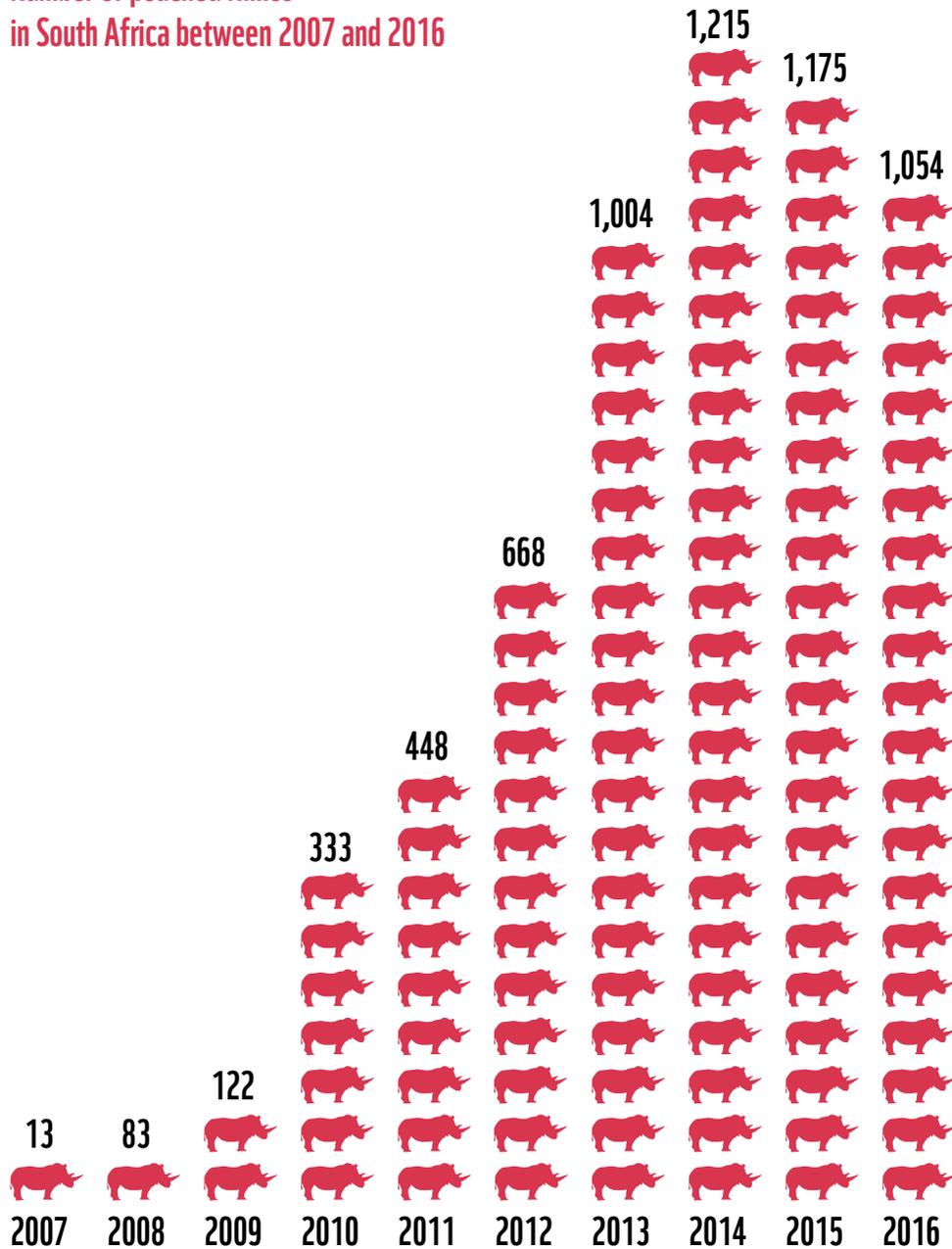
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Number of poached rhinos in South Africa between 2007 and 2016



Source: IUCN Rhino Specialist Group und Department Environmental Affairs, South Africa

On the hit list

After successfully fighting a poaching crisis in the 1980s, illegal **elephant** hunting in Africa has been on the rise again since around 2007. The great demand for “white gold” has its price, especially in China: Over the last years, more African elephants have died than were born; the population is in rapid decline. Between 2007 and 2015, around 110,000 animals disappeared – which represents a good 20% of the estimated Africa-wide population of 395,000 – 570,000 elephants. Some regional populations, for example in Central Africa and Tanzania, were decimated by more than half. In Minkébé National Park in Gabon, the numbers plummeted by as much as 80%. Even if poaching were to completely stop now, it would take many years – in the case of African forest elephants up to 100 years – for the original population sizes to be recovered. Asian elephants have also presumably fallen victim to poachers more frequently again in the last few years, but much less information is available.



In 2016 alone, around 20,000 elephants and more than 1,000 rhinos were poached for the illegal wildlife trade.

The situation of the two **African rhino species**, the black and white rhino, is equally serious. Poaching has drastically increased in the last few years and has shot up from 60 illegally killed animals in 2006 to 1,342 in 2015. Most of the animals are poached in South Africa because the country is home to almost 80% of the Africa-wide rhino populations. In 2016 alone, another 1,054 rhinos were poached here, which increased the total number of animals killed for Asian medicinal superstitions and status needs to more than 7,100 between 2006 and 2016. This is an alarmingly high number in view of the slightly more than 25,000 animals remaining on the continent. But it is not just the two African species that are killed illegally. The Indian rhino, the Java rhino and the Sumatran rhino, which all live in Asia, are also increasingly attracting attention again. In Vietnam, the remains of the last Java rhino in the country were found in 2010 – it had been shot by poachers and its horn removed.

Poaching and illegal trafficking also share responsibility for the massive decline of **tiger** populations which have shrunk by 97% from over 100,000 to only 3,200 in the last 100 years. It is not just the fur of the big cats that is sought-after. Their bones, teeth and a variety of other body parts are popular in some Asian countries because they are used as traditionally ascribed medicinal substances to alleviate various ailments. Law enforcement agencies have confiscated the remains of at least 1,755 tigers in the first 15 years of the 21st century alone. In spite of everything, there are now almost 3,900 tigers in the wild again – the first increase in a century thanks to internationally coordinated tiger conservation work. Illegal trade in tiger parts is still flourishing, also because demand is increasingly met by farmed tigers, and continues to pose a key threat to the striped big cat.



In addition to elephants and rhinos, many other species such as gorillas are threatened by wildlife crime.

And people's greed knows no limits, even when it comes to their closest relative: more than 1,800 **great apes** are known to have been caught for illegal trade between 2005 and 2011. Experts estimate that this number could in fact be as high as 22,000 animals for this period, considering the number of undiscovered cases. Orangutans and chimpanzees in particular are sold as pets and to disreputable amusement parks, zoos or other facilities. The growing market for bush meat, mainly in Central Africa, is also endangering the populations of African great apes. Gorillas, for example, are considered a delicacy there and are poached in the thousands every year from the Central African rain forests.

Of the huge sums of money generated by wildlife products on the Asian market, only a fraction usually ends up in the hands of poachers. The real profit is made by the traffickers who siphon off sizeable profits with relatively low risk. This prospect has lent poaching and illegal trade in wildlife products a whole new quality in the last few years: organised crime operates with highly professional and well-networked poachers and gangs of smugglers and has identified a new line of business in this extremely lucrative trade.

But the theft of nature not only puts biodiversity and ecosystem functionality at risk, it also threatens potentials for economic development and rural livelihoods and undermines the rule of law and good governance of entire states.

In this context, the United Nations classified illegal wildlife trade as a serious crime in its Resolution No. 69/314 from 2015 and called upon its member states to take resolute action to combat it.

Feeding the flames: poverty, corruption and insufficient staffing

Even though the high demand for many species in Asia acts as the driving force behind poaching—many problems in the animals’ countries of origin facilitate illegal killing. For example, more elephants tend to be poached in regions where **poverty** is also widespread. At the same time, some of the animal species affected by poaching such as elephants and lions trigger conflicts with local residents, for example, because they prey on livestock or destroy cropland. This, in turn, reduces the willingness of local communities to coexist with these species in their immediate environment and to support efforts to fight poaching to this end. The support of the local population, however, is essential in the fight against poaching since they, as direct neighbours of wildlife reserves, can provide important information to both poachers as well as anti-poaching units. Poverty alleviation, better education and alternative sources of income for the local residents as well as a reduction in the number of conflicts between wildlife and the local population are therefore essential prerequisites to successfully fighting poaching.

Corruption in particular is one of the most important factors that work to the advantage of wildlife crime. Bribery at all levels in the trade chain, make trafficking in wildlife a lucrative crime with low risk – be it the ranger who supplies information about locations of animals and patrolling colleagues, the border official who turns a blind eye when inspecting obviously illegal cargo or the judge who imposes only a minor punishment or no punishment at all. Many of the countries involved in trade have a poor rating in the corruption index which makes it even easier to exploit backdoor channels. The correlations between wildlife crime and corruption have also become relevant for the international community. Among other things, the issue was discussed in the resolution of the United Nations “Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife“ (2015), at the 17th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on

International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Johannesburg (2016) as well as the 17th Anti-Corruption Conference held in Panama (2016). In addition, the problem was addressed by the G20 leaders in their summit-declaration in Hamburg in 2017.

Also the countries affected often lack well-trained **personnel** that monitors and enforces implementation of the laws to preserve the country's biodiversity. According to a survey of 570 rangers in Africa, around 60% felt poorly equipped, more than 40% felt they lacked the appropriate training to carry out their work and almost 20% thought their pay was too low or irregular. A further study also shows insufficient insurance in the case of personal injury, disability or death. How serious these facts are is shown by the last ten years in which more than 1,000 rangers have lost their lives protecting nature, a good three-quarters of them directly in the fight with poachers and militias. 82% of respondents working as African rangers said they had found themselves in a life-threatening situation at least once. Improving the working conditions and insurance situations of rangers is therefore key to effectively protecting endangered animal species from poaching, as well as preventing corruption on the front line in the fight against poaching.



One of the key players in the fight against poaching and yet still poorly equipped, understaffed and not insured in many places: rangers.

Smuggler routes

Elephants, rhinos, tigers and great apes all fall under the provisions of the **CITES Convention** which regulates international trade in endangered flora and fauna. The import and export of these species is either not allowed at all or only under strict conditions. However, these limitations are systematically circumvented by poaching syndicates and the poached animals or animal parts easily smuggled through international networks. The criminal gangs are well-organised and often use transit countries, sophisticated concealment methods for their goods and flexible smuggling routes to make investigators' jobs as difficult as possible. The involvement of corrupt staff at export and import ports as well as at customs reduces the risk of detection.

A lot of illegal cargo therefore goes undiscovered and most illegal wildlife products reach their target countries. When it comes to illicit trade with rhino horn, it is assumed that about 75% of the illegal horns from Africa are smuggled to Asia. The quantity of seized wildlife products is thus only the tip of the iceberg – even if it is a very large one: the authorities responsible seized, for example, about 270 metric tonnes of ivory (2007–2014) and more than 5 metric tonnes of rhino horn (2010–2015) in recent years.

Contraband ivory seized globally 2007–2014



Source: Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS)

The illegal smuggling routes from Africa to Asia are diverse. They are well-connected and fragmented consistent with the nature of **organised crime**. Due to the low rates of seizure and the varied routes, the details of smuggling practices are not fully known. Analyses conducted by the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) show, however, that seizures of large consignments of illegal raw ivory with more than 100 kg further increased in 2015 which suggests heightened activity of organised crime. It also appears that the main routes change often. While South Africa was one of the most active export ports for ivory to Asia between 2000–2008, there has been a shift to eastern and western Africa in recent years, with more large-calibre seizures, especially in Kenya and Tanzania, since 2009.

Even if not everything is known, partial aspects of smuggling can be reconstructed or it can be better understood on the basis of individual seizures. For example, the fact that ivory is confiscated in countries like Malawi which only has few elephants is an indication that illegal products can be smuggled hundreds of kilometres over land and via intra-African transit countries before it leaves the continent in the direction of Asia. In the case of rhino horn, we know that it is transported mainly from the central source country of South Africa via Mozambique as a transit land to Vietnam and China. While the horn usually makes its way to Asia in smaller quantities, making it possible to transport by plane, the large transports of illegal ivory are primarily smuggled by shipping container. But regardless of whether by air or ship – it is important that the contraband is well concealed. Some smugglers use strong smelling substances like garlic to prevent discovery by tracking dogs. Others rely on their contacts to corrupt cargo staff. Once in Asia, transit countries and long routes over land and across national borders can be used again until the illegal wildlife products have reached their final destination: the sellers and customers.



Large seizures of ivory of a hundred kilos or more are not rare.

But routes via Europe can also not be ruled out: in 2016 alone, several hundred kilograms of ivory were seized in Spain, France and Austria – in Germany even almost 1.2 metric tonnes were confiscated in two connected cases. In addition to these worrying cases of illegal ivory trade, the European Union is the world's largest exporter of legal ivory, i.e. pre-convention ivory and antiques. It supplied China and Hong Kong with most of their imported raw ivory for legitimate trade in recent years.

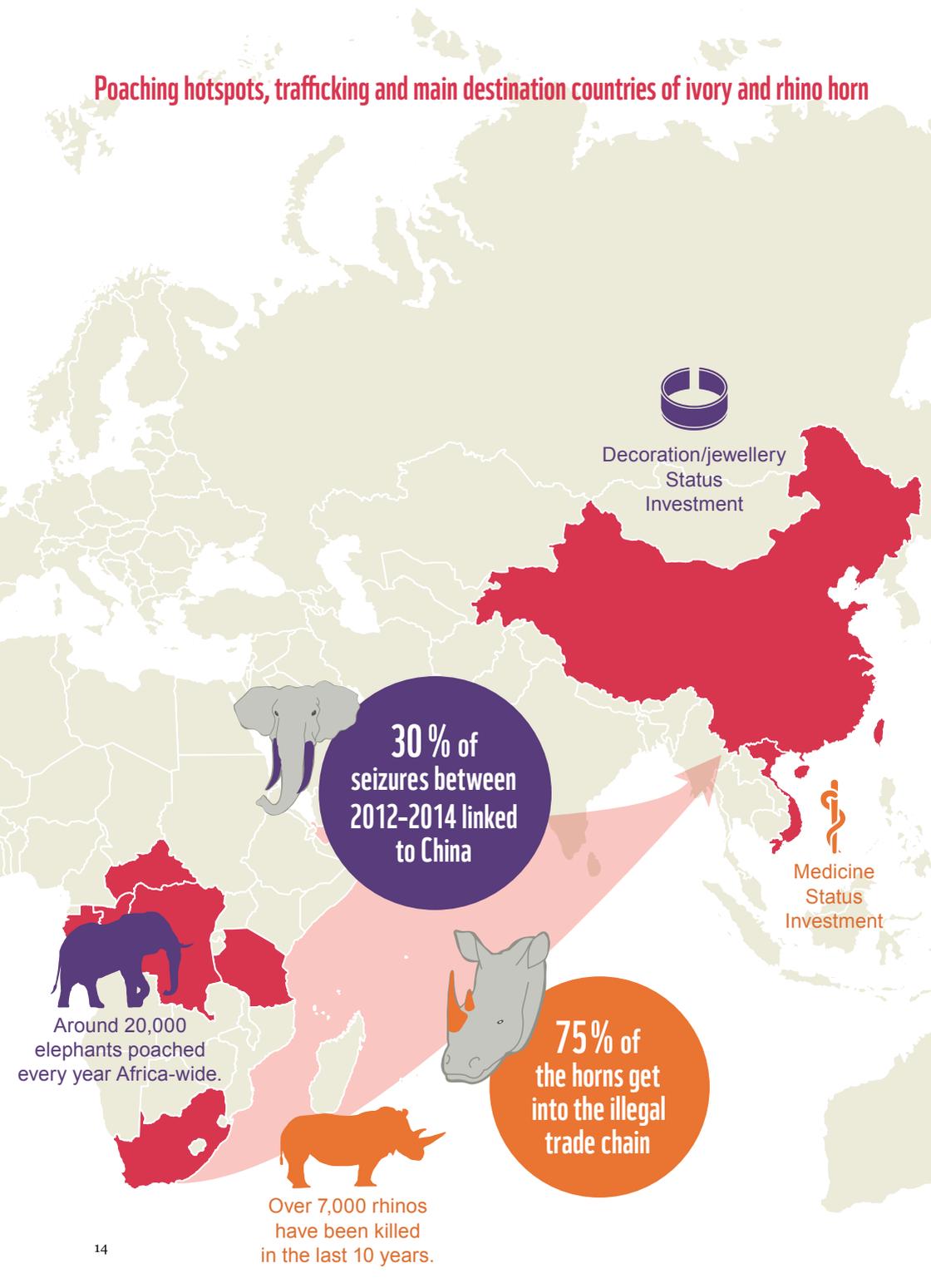
Poaching hotspots, trafficking and main destination countries of ivory and rhino horn

Destination: Asia

The high demand for wildlife products like ivory and rhino horn is booming in various Asian countries and is the driving force behind poaching in Africa. Ivory has a long **tradition** in its largest sales market China. It is said to have many positive properties – it has a high cultural, social and aesthetic value and is now also increasingly seen as a good economic investment. It is turned into art carvings and jewellery in China, but also in other countries that work or buy ivory such as Hong Kong, Thailand and Vietnam. Used as a luxury item or gift, it is supposed to elevate personal status or strengthen social ties.

The trade regulations for ivory are complex. According to the CITES regulation, fresh ivory has been prohibited from international trading for commercial purposes since 1989. But some countries allow antique ivory to be worked or sold at national level according to their own defined policies. Even though the tusks of freshly poached elephants may not be sold on these “open” markets in theory, they make it possible to launder illegal ivory and bring it to market. The decision of the United States, China and Hong Kong, as three of the world’s biggest consumers of ivory, to seriously restrict or completely close their national markets was therefore an important step in the fight against poaching.

Demand for rhino horn is particularly high in Vietnam and China. Historically it has been touted in **traditional medicine** as a fever reducer and anti-spasmodic. The alleged statement of a high-level government representative in Vietnam that the horn had cured his cancer stimulated demand further. The horn, like finger nails and hair, consists mainly of keratin and so far no proof has been found of a medicinal effect. Thanks to its high value, the horn has become not only a popular luxury item, but also a status icon in recent years. Its purported anti-toxic effect prompts wealthy partygoers, for example, to endorse the horn as an exclusive hangover remedy.



Both Vietnam and China are signatories of CITES which prohibits trade in rhino parts on an international level. And at national level as well both countries have prohibited trade in new horns. They are therefore traded on the black market at exorbitant prices and are among the most valuable wild animal products in the world.

Thanks to their high value and high profit margins, the criminals have become increasingly creative. In addition to thefts from museums, national warehouses and auction houses mainly between 2011 and 2013, the cases of “pseudo-hunting” have drawn attention since 2006. Dealers used trophy hunting of rhinos in South Africa as an easy way to obtain and export the horn legally and then sell it in Asia through illegal channels. Vietnamese, Thai and Czech citizens in particular were involved in whitewashed hunting for the purpose of illicit trafficking. After they noticed the scam, the South African government passed stricter rules for the known pseudo-hunting countries in 2012 to prevent further exploitation of the system. Another alarming case was the rhino killed in a zoo in Paris in March 2017 whose horn was removed and stolen. Following the cases of horn thefts from European museums, it seems that the unscrupulousness of the poaching gangs has reached a new level also here in Europe.

The rule of law and potential for development are at risk

110,000 elephants fewer than there were ten years ago, an average of 70,000 pangolins that fall victim to trafficking every year and rhino horn that is worth more than gold on the illicit market and prompt poachers to use any means at their disposal. The current assessment of the poaching crisis is alarming for nature and species conservation. But wildlife crime has much more far-reaching effects.

As part of the fourth largest offense in the world, wildlife crime is similar to drug or human trafficking, with strong ties to organised crime. Cross-links between these criminal operations and to other illegal activities such as money laundering and corruption are known. These networks generally undermine the **rule of law** and **good governance** in the countries affected.

Known are also cases in which armed groups, such as the Lord’s Resistance Army or Al-Shabaab, have used the illegal trade in ivory to finance part of their military activities. This presumably opportunistic use as a source of income shows how illegal trade in wild animal products can also contribute to **destabilising** entire regions.

The situation is especially grim as it is not only the products of these wild animals that have a high economic value, but also the living animals themselves. For example, elephants and rhinos have great potential for tourism and can generate urgently needed **sources of income** in rural regions through the growing tourism sector in Africa. In the next ten years, 5 million new jobs could be created by tourism in Africa alone, with wildlife tourism being one of the most important mainstays of the African tourism industry. It is against this background that the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations (UNWTO) classified wildlife crime as a serious threat to Africa’s socio-economic development.

This situation has pushed wildlife crime more into the focus of **national and international policies**. Today, the issue is at the very top of the agenda in many countries and is discussed in many international forums as well as in the context of other relevant institutions such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as well as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). The fight against wildlife crime is a component of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), central for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and one of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Ground-breaking was Resolution No. 69/314 of the United Nations in 2015 strongly supported by the governments of Gabon and Germany, which conveyed the urgency and severity of the situation and called on the international community to take firm and joint action.



The global dimensions of wildlife crime have moved into the focus of policymakers. Public burnings are intended to send a clear signal.

Solutions and WWF's work

The fight against poaching is one of the priorities of WWF Germany's work. Under the scope of the Wildlife Crime Initiative launched by WWF together with its partner TRAFFIC, the organisations set the goal of working at all three levels of wildlife crime to achieve a 50% decrease in the problem, in the areas of poaching, trafficking and demand by 2024. This is being completed by work at policy level and in public relations.

Thanks to the ongoing work of the two partners as well as many other organisations worldwide, wildlife crime is today seen as what it is by most states: serious, internationally organised crime which represents an acute threat for a number of protected animal and plant species and deprives the countries of origin of significant natural resources.



In its fight against poaching, WWF supports local rangers, the improvement of law enforcement and the creation of anti-poaching strategies in Africa, among others.

Many countries in **Africa** are massively stepping up their work in the fight against poaching. In Malawi and Mozambique, for example, the laws were tightened in 2016. In Malawi, serious violations of wildlife trade laws can now be punished with up to 30 years in prison. Mozambique also adopted a draft law which will make it possible to not only punish poachers, but also helpers and smugglers in the future – an important step for the country which acts as a primary smuggling route for poached rhino horn from South Africa.

Precisely because of its organised, well-networked structures, it is important that states don't just combat illicit trade at local level, with communities, better trained rangers and stricter laws, but also work together across borders. African communities of states such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), for example, have thus adopted action plans against poaching and are pursuing more effective law enforcement. There are also official declarations of intent to cooperate in the fight against the illegal trade that already exist between some African and Asian countries.

WWF supports all these activities, for example, as an advisor in the creation of action plans and strategies, by supporting the work of rangers and involving local communities and by implementing training for state prosecutors.

In the fight against poaching and illegal wildlife trade in Asia, two factors play a particularly important role: good law enforcement that makes it more difficult for the perpetrators to do business and a fundamental reduction in the demand for these products.

As two of the most important markets in **Asia**, Vietnam and China have a special role to play here. While China took an important first step to facilitate prosecution and discourage potential ivory buyers with its decision published at the end of 2016 to close the national ivory markets within a year, Vietnam faces frequent international criticism because of its seeming inactivity.

Especially the case of the uncovered illegal wildlife market in Nhi Khe, where the government has pursued no appreciable prosecution of the offenders or of the market in spite of the extensive evidence, has been indicative for the weak criminal prosecution in the country.

WWF works closely with its partner TRAFFIC to help reduce demand. Together they conduct effective public campaigns and implement studies to be able to better understand markets and buyer motivation. TRAFFIC is also very active in the training and awareness-raising of various relevant interest groups including companies, the tourism sector and practitioners of traditional medicine.

But wildlife crime is not just a problem faced by African and Asian countries – it involves countries all around the world: as source, transit and consumer countries or as important supporters, lobbyists and donors in the fight against this crime. To effectively combat poaching and illegal wildlife trafficking, complex and internationally organised crime, the **entire international community** needs to take **joint and resolute action**.



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Up to EUR 20 billion

The United Nations Environment Programme estimates the annual value of wildlife crime to be EUR 6–20 billion.

Around 20,000

Approximately 20,000 elephants have to die every year in Africa to sell their ivory in Asia.

75%

Between 2012 and 2015 an estimated 75% of illegally acquired rhino horns were smuggled for illegal trade from Africa.



Over 7,000

More than 7,000 rhinos were poached in Africa in the past ten years – today there are still around 25,500 African rhinos.

Ranked fourth

Together with other environmental crimes like illegal logging, wildlife crime is the fourth largest criminal offense worldwide.

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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