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Hearing on Countering Wildlife Trafficking

Introduction

Good morning Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Lowey, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the U.S. Agency for International Development, I would like to thank the Subcommittee for holding today's hearing and for the opportunity to testify.

The U.S. Government employs a whole-of-government approach to address the complex problem of Wildlife Trafficking. We work closely with other government agencies, including the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, to ensure that programs are coordinated and streamlined. These efforts avoid programmatic overlap and enhance effectiveness by incorporating our respective technical and operational strengths.

USAID, along with our State Department colleagues represented here today, continues to be deeply concerned by the current poaching crisis and the threat it represents to wildlife. The slaughter of thousands of animals and the murder of park rangers trying to protect these species must be stopped. Swift action is also needed to stem the rapid depletion of fish stocks and other marine life in our oceans.

With the generous support and interest of this Committee and with USAID's focus on addressing the most critical threats to biodiversity, USAID has dramatically increased support to combat wildlife trafficking from $13 million in FY 2012 to an estimated $54 million in FY 2015. We launched 35 new programs in the past two years, in addition to 30 programs already underway, and operate in 30 countries. These programs range from large efforts like our program in Central Africa to combat wildlife trafficking on a regional level to smaller, more targeted efforts like our work in Nepal for community anti-poaching patrols that has contributed to a record of nearly zero tiger or rhino poaching in that country in the past five years.

Combating the illegal wildlife trade and promoting conservation are critically important to USAID and our mission to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies. The

rural poor disproportionately depend on natural resources for their survival. At least 1.6 billion people worldwide rely on forests for their livelihood and over 2.6 billion people in developing countries depend on fish for protein and income. Wildlife tourism sustains local communities from the Peruvian Amazon to the savannahs of Tanzania.

Wildlife trafficking has far-reaching economic, national security, and ecological consequences that are undermining decades of development gains. Poaching threatens tourism, a major contributor to GDP in several developing countries like Kenya where it is the second largest economic sector. Organized criminal networks and militias are drawn to the low risks and high profits associated with wildlife trafficking, destabilizing countries and fostering corruption that discourages foreign investment. And the poaching of keystone species like tigers and elephants disrupts sensitive food webs, with cascading consequences for entire ecosystems.

USAID's Role in Combating Wildlife Trafficking

USAID has a history of supporting efforts to conserve and protect wildlife. Our work has focused on supporting anti-poaching efforts, often via community conservation, where local people derive benefits from protecting natural resources, such as wildlife.

But when the current poaching crisis escalated in the late 2000s, it became clear that traditional conservation approaches were no longer sufficient. Powerful wildlife trafficking syndicates are organized, armed, and exploit corruption and weak governance to operate with impunity. Many of these syndicates also traffic in guns, drugs, and human beings—and increasingly use sophisticated military hardware. To address this crisis, we needed new strategies and partnerships with experts outside of traditional conservation.

Accordingly, USAID's response has shifted to focus on the entire supply chain, taking a comprehensive approach that deploys a combination of tactics in each of the countries where we have identified wildlife trafficking as a major threat.

Our efforts are focused on sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the illegal trade between them. Work in Africa is primarily focused on preventing poaching in the first place, often in partnership with local communities, and strengthening legal and judicial systems essential to holding wildlife criminals accountable and deterring further illegal activity. Work in Asia prioritizes detecting illegal wildlife products in marketplaces and ports of entry, and reducing demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products such as food, medicine, and status symbols—the root cause of the problem. Globally, we support the analyses, international cooperation, and capacity building

needed by governments to disrupt illicit trade and dismantle organized crime and trafficking networks, and promote technology solutions that can amplify and sustain results.

New partnerships are part of the key to addressing the wildlife trafficking crisis. USAID partners with the International Air Transport Association and others in the transportation and logistics sectors to disrupt trafficking transit routes. In tiger and snow leopard range countries, we partner with INTERPOL to train government officials to use their fugitive notice system. This has resulted in the arrest of 20 fugitives, including Nepal's biggest trader in illegal wildlife. In Mozambique, our partnership with the Carr Foundation is helping protect wildlife in Gorongosa National Park.

USAID's efforts are a critical component of the implementation of the Administration's *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking*. The *National Strategy* establishes guiding principles and priorities for U.S. interagency cooperation and coordination to stem the illegal trade in wildlife via effective enforcement, demand reduction, and increased international collaboration. The *National Strategy* also affirms our Government's resolve to work in partnership with other governments, local communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and others to combat wildlife trafficking.

Preventing Poaching

The majority of USAID'S FY 2014 and FY 2015 investments support more effective anti-poaching patrols in national parks, reserves, and community managed areas in more than 15 countries where poaching has hit hardest. We conduct this work in cooperation with our colleagues at the Department of State, Department of Interior, Department of Justice, and other federal agencies. In particular, we rely on the Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service to bring their expertise to the Congo Basin as a key implementing partner of USAID's comprehensive program to combat wildlife crime in the region.

In Central Africa, where poaching has decimated elephant populations by 62 percent since 2002, USAID programs, through partners including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have provided gear, GPS units, and hand-held computers to more than 400 eco-guards with to improve law enforcement and monitoring. These patrols are now providing credible, actionable data on wildlife presence and poaching. Such data enable park authorities to improve patrol effectiveness by concentrating on high-intensity poaching areas, apprehending poachers at entry and exit points, and arresting and turning them over for prosecution. USAID also supported guard post construction in parks and reserves in the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of

Congo (DRC), and the creation of more mobile patrol units allowing for greater, more strategic monitoring of critical areas.

In FY 2015, combined efforts across Central Africa resulted in the destruction of nearly 1,800 snares and traps, the seizure of 2,800 firearms, and the apprehension of over 400 poachers. In two protected areas in DRC, 22 ivory tusks and 249 live parrots were seized, and two poachers were tried and sentenced to 15-20 years in prison. The outcomes of these court trials serve as a strong signal to both the local communities and the criminal networks in Kinshasa that there are severe consequences for poaching in protected areas.

Supporting Community-based Wildlife Conservation

In FY 2015, USAID continued to empower local people to manage their natural resources and strengthen anti-poaching systems. Local communities play a critical role in combating wildlife trafficking, from their deep knowledge of local areas, to their members serving on patrols protecting wildlife, to supporting information-sharing networks about criminal activity. Sustained, long-term support for community conservation has resulted in some of the most successful conservation efforts to date, and poaching tends to be lower in areas where communities benefit from healthy wildlife populations.

In Kenya, where up to 60 percent of wildlife spend part of their year outside of parks and reserves, USAID-supported community conservancies cover nearly eight million acres of Kenya's arid northern rangelands. Conservancies, formed by some of the most historically disadvantaged rural poor, manage their wildlife, water, and pasture to the benefit of their members and in doing so foster greater security and peace, create jobs, and conserve wildlife. To secure these gains in the face of increasing elephant poaching, USAID supported a tripling of community ranger enrollment at the Kenya Wildlife Service Field Training School, and graduates carry out regular patrols and work closely with government forces. Healthy wildlife populations provide economic opportunities through ecotourism and patrols provide safety from poaching and banditry, all leading to secure and safe communities. Likely as a result of these efforts, Kenyan conservancies have had a 46 percent reduction in elephant poaching in FY2015 compared to FY2012-2013.

Local people are the eyes and ears of law enforcement, and information gathering systems within local communities are critical to combat wildlife trafficking. In the Democratic Republic of Congo's Salonga landscape, information from communities led to the re-arrest of a notorious poacher after he had escaped from local prison. On the Philippines' Tawi Tawi island, a six-month deployment of an anonymous hotline generated more than 3,000 reports of illegal fishing

violations that led to 25 arrests. This model is being deployed in seven more key marine biodiversity areas in the country.

Strengthening Legal and Judicial Systems

Most countries have laws pertaining to wildlife, but too often they are not known or enforced. In many countries, if offenders are charged and sentenced, fines and jail time are too minimal to deter repeat offenses and other would-be criminals. To address these challenges, USAID is supporting Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, and the Philippines to strengthen their respective legislative frameworks for combating wildlife crime, and to improve capacity to apply relevant laws by police, prosecutors, and judges in Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Philippines, Indonesia, and several countries in mainland southeast Asia.

For example, USAID helped Mozambique develop a new Conservation Law, passed in 2014, that criminalizes wildlife trafficking and improves community incentives for conservation. We also helped Mozambique's Attorney General's Office bring together elected officials, law enforcement officers, conservation leaders, and reporters to develop a strategy to better prosecute wildlife traffickers and combat organized crime. A new USAID program builds upon these successes by supporting and advising on the regulatory reforms needed to apply the new law, while also securing approval to charge offenders under the new law even in the absence of detailed regulations.

USAID is supporting the International Conservation Caucus Foundation's efforts to build host country parliamentarian constituencies for conservation in places like Kenya and Colombia.

Detecting Illegally Traded Wildlife and Wildlife Products

Building capacity to detect illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products is part of every USAID-supported program to combat wildlife trafficking. Once an animal is taken from the wild, detection and confiscation provides the evidence needed to apprehend the kingpins and middlemen who profit most from wildlife crime.

Since 2011, through our regional program in Southeast Asia, USAID has supported training through Wildlife Enforcement Networks for more than 8,500 local government officials in wildlife-specific law enforcement skills and techniques, resulting in a tenfold increase in wildlife trafficking confiscations. USAID also supported the development of a new multilingual mobile application that helps frontline law enforcement quickly identify whether an animal or animal product is one of more than 300 endangered species whose trade is regulated or prohibited.

Trafficked wildlife products often move by air or sea through a relative handful of airports and seaports. With effective systems and partnerships, USAID is turning these spigots into chokepoints. In Asia, our partners trained customs agents and baggage handlers at Bangkok Airport and employees of Delta and Kenya Airlines, on how to detect and respond to wildlife trafficking. Similar training is being planned for Vietnam. Through an exciting new partnership, USAID is now working with representatives from a broader range of airlines and industry associations, government and international enforcement officials, NGOs, and other donors to more effectively keep illegal wildlife products off of commercial transportation.

Detecting wildlife products early in the supply chain, before they leave the source country, is essential to hurting traffickers financially and recovering live wildlife where possible. One of the most effective detection tools is man's best friend. In Kazakhstan, for example, USAID helped establish a wildlife-detecting sniffer dog program to detect both drugs *and* the horn of the threatened saiga antelope. Since canine graduation in 2014, at least two separate incidences of saiga horn smuggling have been thwarted using these dogs, and detection dogs are also known to provide a deterrent to trafficking wildlife. USAID support is now facilitating deployment of ivory and rhino horn detection dogs to the Juba airport in South Sudan, the port of Mombasa in Kenya, and transport hubs in Tanzania.

Reducing Consumer Demand

A growing part of USAID's portfolio seeks to reduce consumer demand for wildlife, the root cause of wildlife trafficking. Since 2011, our flagship demand reduction program leveraged $4 million from government and private partnerships to reach more than 740 million people across Asia through the internet, TV spots, and installations in airports, train stations, and border crossings. Our campaigns use print and video public service announcements (PSAs) by celebrities, officials, and other key opinion leaders to encourage personal responsibility in not buying wildlife products and discouraging consumption among peers.

The results are encouraging. In Vietnamese cities with behavior change campaigns, a recent survey reported a 59 percent reduction in wildlife criminal violations from 2014 numbers. In Thailand, 21 more hotels joined the "Blue List" of businesses pledging to stop serving shark fin soup, bringing the total to more than 180 businesses since the campaign began in 2013. In 2014, nearly one thousand PSAs were posted in the subways of 10 Chinese cities, covering nearly half of the cities with subway systems. More than one hundred PSAs were placed at five international airports and another hundred were installed at bus stops in two cities. For several months, video PSAs were running on 90,000 buses in 34 major Chinese cities.

Early evidence suggests that these efforts may be contributing to a downward trend in consumer demand for ivory. According to new research, the value of illegal ivory has almost halved in China, leading to indications that the demand driving elephant poaching in Africa might be waning. Growing consumer awareness in China about the impacts of buying ivory is thought to have contributed to the reduced demand for elephant tusks.

Analyses and Technology Development

USAID supports a variety of efforts to better understand wildlife trade dynamics and identify and prioritize intervention points. Detailed analyses of transcontinental ivory, rhino horn, and abalone trafficking have identified law enforcement capacity gaps and generated demand from governments and the private sector for assistance in tackling challenges particular to these wildlife products. These analyses have also inspired workshops bringing together governments, NGOs, and the private sector to discuss solutions to wildlife trafficking on commercial transport and customs weaknesses.

In Senegal, a recent USAID-supported analysis revealed that 60 percent of fish taken from Senegalese waters are taken illegally. And of the legal catch, only about 30 percent are reported to national officials. When this information was released, the public demanded government action. With the help of French and U.S. military surveillance, a Russian trawler fishing illegally was detained and issued a substantial fine. Since then, three other trawlers operating illegally have been fined up to $2 million.

USAID views technology as a "force multiplier" in the war on wildlife crime, with potential to scale the reach, impact, and effectiveness of every intervention. From user-friendly anti-poaching software to mobile apps that identify species in illegal trade, our support for technology is making a difference. Recognizing this, we are currently fostering new innovations and applications of technology. Our Wildlife Crime Tech Challenge--a partnership with National Geographic, the Smithsonian Institution, and the wildlife trade monitoring network, TRAFFIC-- recently announced 16 winners from around the world who submitted innovative solutions to detect transit routes, strengthen forensic evidence, reduce consumer demand, and tackle corruption. These extraordinary innovators proposed solutions ranging from camera traps integrated with seismic sensors to portable electronic "sniffers" and online whistleblower platforms. We are currently working with the winners to support the application of their technologies in the field where they are sorely needed.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding these recent signs of progress and promising new trends in consumer demand, the illegal wildlife trade continues at unacceptable levels, with devastating consequences for wildlife, local prosperity, and our shared global heritage. Huge challenges remain. Corruption continues to obstruct progress and infiltrates ranger units, customs and border control, and the highest levels of power. Governments still lack sufficient training, resources, and political will to respond effectively. USAID remains committed to responding to this crisis aggressively.

We will keep focusing on the whole supply chain with partners from within and outside traditional conservation. We will continue to invest in strategies that work, like community conservation, which provides the foundation for lasting success. New partnerships and investments in technology will complement our efforts to prevent poaching, strengthen laws, shut down trafficking routes, and reduce consumer demand for wildlife. All of this work is strengthened by close cooperation with our partners in Congress and our inter-agency colleagues, and with support from the international community.

I would like to thank you again for your support on this issue and for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to your questions and counsel.