

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Hearing on “International Wildlife Trafficking Threats to Conservation and National Security”
February 26, 2014**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

This hearing will come to order. There’s a new battlefield in the fight against organized crime, rebel groups, and terrorists organizations. Sadly, it is Africa’s national parks.

As one witness will tell the Committee, we are at a “*pivotal* moment in the conservation movement” – with an “*alarming*, unprecedented, and *dramatic* increase in the *slaughter* of wildlife” across the continent.

The numbers speak for themselves. In 2011, over 17,000 elephants were killed in sub-Saharan Africa illegally; that is, outside controlled, sport hunting. That number nearly doubled to 30,000 in 2012 – an average of one every 20 minutes. Between 1990 and 2005 about 14 rhinos were killed a year in South Africa. But last year – over one *thousand* were illegally killed.

Driving this slaughter is the value of elephant ivory and rhino horns on Asian black markets. Ivory is worth roughly \$1,000 per kilogram, while rhino horn is \$60,000 per kilo – more than platinum or cocaine. Today, wildlife trafficking is among the most lucrative criminal activities worldwide, generating revenues of between \$8-10 billion per year. That sort of cash allows today’s poacher to buy helicopters, high powered weapons, and night vision goggles. The intelligence community is increasingly noting the “traffickers use of sophisticated networks” to move their product.

This wildlife trafficking isn’t a threat just to wildlife, but increasingly national security. Rebel militias and terrorists are capitalizing on this trade. Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army are exploiting the region’s most unique and limited natural resources to fund its brutal violence. Al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Somalia, is believed to have turned to the ivory trade for funding.

In response to this crisis, I authored legislation last Congress to expand the State Department’s rewards program to target transnational criminal syndicates. That is now being put to use, with the first reward issued under this expanded authority targeting an individual known as the “Pablo Escobar of wildlife trafficking.”

In order to take a comprehensive look at this problem, the President established an interagency “Task Force.” As a starting point, the group developed and published the *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking*, which we look forward to assessing today.

Uniquely, the Task Force also sought advice from an Advisory Council of outside experts. This included David Barron of the International Conservation Caucus Foundation. David has worked with Congress for years on these critical issues. There are many others, including Africans, whose views must be heard.

As this strategy was being developed, several of us members of Congress urged the Administration to act boldly, and utilize the tools and resources that we currently use to dismantle other illicit transnational networks. One thing is clear to me – whether dealing with global terrorist networks such as Hezbollah, international arms dealers like Viktor Bout, or even tackling North Korea’s illicit activities – when the U.S. government is focused and directed – it can deliver devastating blows to our enemies. That’s what’s needed here.

Future generations will judge our response to this crisis. If we want a world still blessed with these magnificent species, we need creative and aggressive action, working with source, transit, and market countries to confront this challenge. As Director Ashe will testify, “the criminals have raised their game, and we must do the same.”

I’ll now turn to the Ranking Member for any opening comments he may have.