

**Statement of  
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**Before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
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**Introduction**

Good afternoon Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Keating, and other Members of the Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

It's particularly fitting that we are holding this hearing today, which marks the 45th anniversary of Earth Day. As you well know, events are being held around the world today to raise public awareness and concern for organisms, the environment and public health. Wildlife trafficking threatens each of these areas: iconic species are being pushed to the brink of extinction; illegal harvest of and trade in plants and trees destroys needed habitat and opens access to previously remote populations of highly endangered wildlife; and the illegal trade in live animals and their parts bypasses public health controls and puts human populations at risk for disease.

Wildlife trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar criminal enterprise that is both a conservation concern and an acute security threat. The increasing involvement of organized crime in poaching and trafficking of wildlife promotes corruption, threatens peace and security of fragile regions, strengthens illicit trade routes, destabilizes economies and communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihoods, and contributes to the spread of disease.

The good news is that the international community is coming together in an unprecedented way to combat this pernicious trade. Shared understanding and commitment, along with the efforts of governments, the international community, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, corporations, civil society, and

individuals are critical for collective action to address this evolving transnational threat.

The State Department has long recognized the threats that wildlife trafficking poses and Secretary Kerry has long championed efforts to combat wildlife trafficking. As Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he held hearings on the subject. In his role as Secretary of State, he has called on leaders everywhere to step up and meet the challenge of stopping the trade in illegal wildlife products across the supply chain from source to consumer.

### **National Strategy**

Recognizing the urgent need for a coordinated response to this growing global crisis, on July 1, 2013, President Obama issued an Executive Order that established an inter-agency Task Force on combating wildlife trafficking co-chaired by the Departments of State, Justice, and the Interior and charged it with developing a strategy to guide U.S. efforts on this issue. The *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking* (National Strategy) was released on February 11, 2014, and describes a “whole of government” approach to tackle this growing threat, identifying priority areas for inter-agency coordination, with the objectives of harnessing and strategically applying the full breadth of federal resources. The National Strategy further strengthens U.S. leadership on countering the global security threat posed by transnational criminal organizations that engage in illegal trade in wildlife. It sets three strategic priorities:

- Strengthening domestic and global enforcement, including assessing the related laws, regulations, and enforcement tools;
- Reducing demand for illegally traded wildlife at home and abroad; and
- Building international cooperation and public-private partnerships to combat wildlife poaching and illegal trade.

### **Implementation Plan**

Recognizing that this issue will require significant and sustained effort, over the past year, the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) worked closely with the Co-chairs and other members of the Task Force to develop an Implementation Plan for the National Strategy. The Implementation Plan was released this past February on the first anniversary of the

release of the National Strategy. The Plan will be our roadmap going forward; it details how we will further realize the Strategy's goals, laying out specific next steps, identifying lead agencies for each objective, and defining how we will measure our progress.

Over the past year, as we were developing the Plan, work in the three strategic priority areas has been intensive. OES is leading coordination of two elements of the Strategy – the international cooperation and partnerships and demand reduction components, and – through our support for regional Wildlife Enforcement Networks (WENs) – contributing to the global enforcement element as well.

### **Strengthening Domestic and Global Enforcement**

Driven by high demand and high profits for wildlife and wildlife products, coupled with low risk of detection and often inadequate penalties, criminal syndicates are increasingly drawn to wildlife trafficking, which generates revenues conservatively estimated at \$8-10 billion per year. Rhino horn, for example, is currently worth more than gold, yet in many parts of the world those caught engaging in wildlife trafficking may risk small fines or minimal jail sentencing.

The National Strategy recognizes that to combat wildlife trafficking effectively, countries need to have strong investigative, enforcement, and judicial capabilities in order to respond to wildlife crime, combat corruption, and disrupt trafficking networks and bring traffickers to justice. To this end, under the leadership of the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, we are expanding on our existing international efforts to improve cross-border law enforcement cooperation, strengthen wildlife trafficking legislation, enhance wildlife management, and provide critical training to park rangers, police, customs officials, prosecutors, and judges.

The State Department is working to build global law enforcement capacity in Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America. The International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) Program will continue to provide regional wildlife investigative training at ILEAs in Bangkok and Gaborone. Since 2002, the State Department has trained over 450 law enforcement officers in investigating wildlife crime through Fish and Wildlife Service instruction at ILEA Gaborone.

Together with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and international partners, the State Department funded Cobra II, a global cooperative effort to combat

wildlife trafficking from December 2013 through January 2014. The month-long operation brought together police, customs, and wildlife officials from 28 countries, including China, the United States, and African and Southeast Asian nations, with international enforcement agencies. Together they conducted investigations out of two main coordination centers in Nairobi and Bangkok, with links to field operatives across Africa and Asia. The cross-border law enforcement cooperation and enhanced capacity resulted in numerous arrests of wildlife criminals and significant wildlife seizures across Africa and Asia.

To increase international police and customs investigative capability, the State Department has funded advanced wildlife investigations courses in Thailand organized by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations (ICE /HSI). Furthermore the State Department recently approved funding for an ICE /HSI Transnational Criminal Investigations Unit in Nairobi, Kenya, whose mission will include investigating wildlife trafficking.

#### *Wildlife Enforcement Networks (WENs)*

For the last decade, the State Department and USAID have worked with our partners inside the federal government and external partners to build active coordination and improve information sharing by supporting the establishment of Wildlife Enforcement Networks (WENs) in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central America, the Horn of Africa, and Southern Africa. The State Department is supporting efforts to develop WENs in Southern Africa, South America and the Caribbean. USAID is continuing its investments in the South Asia WEN, while the Southeast Asian WEN is becoming increasingly integrated into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and serving as a model for other WENs such as that in Southern Africa.

As we work to establish more regional networks, we are also working with the International Consortium to Combat Wildlife Crime and other partners to support the creation of a global network of regional WENs to improve communication and strengthen response actions across enforcement agencies globally. By the end of this year, USFWS is also planning to station law enforcement agents at key U.S. missions in Africa, Asia, and South America to partner with and assist law enforcement entities.

#### *National Security*

We are increasingly concerned with links to terrorists and rogue security personnel. There is evidence that some insurgent groups are directly involved in poaching or trafficking, who then trade wildlife products for weapons or safe haven. Like many illicit activities, it is difficult to determine the extent to which these actors are involved in wildlife trafficking. We believe that, at a minimum, these groups are likely sharing some of the same facilitators – such as corrupt customs and border officials, money launderers, and supply chains.

We still have much to learn about the full extent of terrorists and militant groups involvement with wildlife trafficking. One of the goals of our assistance efforts is to promote greater information sharing and coordination within and among governments, law enforcement and intelligence agencies, conservation groups and other actors working in this area.

### **Reducing Demand for Illegally Traded Wildlife**

Global demand for wildlife products has soared in recent years, resulting in a dramatic increase in poaching. The Central African forest elephant population declined by approximately two-thirds between 2002 and 2011, putting forest elephants on track for extinction within the next decade. In 2014, 1,215 rhinos were poached in South Africa alone. At this rate, more than three rhinos are killed *per day* for their horns. This is up from just thirteen rhinos poached in the entire year in 2007.

The National Strategy recognizes that we must address the demand that is driving poaching to unprecedented levels. We recognize that reducing demand is a complex and long-term endeavor, and effective strategies will be species- and country- specific.

Our demand reduction activities include support for campaigns to raise awareness about the devastating impacts of wildlife poaching and trafficking. A significant effort to reduce demand specifically in Asia is the USAID-funded Asia's Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking (ARREST) program. The ARREST program, which USAID plans to support through 2016, has launched a series of strategically targeted, government-endorsed demand reduction campaigns in Thailand, Vietnam, and China and has already been successful in reducing demand for shark fins.

At the State Department, we are engaging diplomatically to catalyze political will and mobilize global support for the fight against wildlife trafficking. This includes

efforts to strengthen international agreements that protect wildlife, promote conservation commitments, and fight wildlife trafficking within and between countries and regions, while enlisting the support of our partners – ranging from non-profit conservation groups and grass-roots activists to private industry and the media.

During the July 2014 U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED) in Beijing Secretary Kerry participated in a public event on wildlife trafficking with China's Vice Premier Liu, State Councilor Yang, and Chinese basketball star Yao Ming. At the event, Secretary Kerry, Liu and Yang reconfirmed their commitment to stamp out the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products and called for greater international cooperation to address the issue. President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping reaffirmed this commitment last November when they met in Beijing. There they pledged to work together to stop the trade in illegal wildlife products across the supply chain from source to consumer through work in the areas of e-commerce, public outreach, joint training, and law enforcement. During the S&ED we also agreed to a session on wildlife trafficking again at the 7th S&ED, to be held this June here in Washington.

As we move forward, we will apply the lessons learned from past campaigns, such as what messages and activities are effective in certain regions. We will also draw from the expertise of the NGO community and the private sector, including the transportation and tourism sectors and online retailers, as we develop a more comprehensive demand reduction strategy.

### **Building International Cooperation and Public-Private Partnerships**

Wildlife trafficking is a global challenge that requires a global response. The National Strategy recognizes that combating wildlife trafficking requires the engagement of governments in range, transit, and demand countries worldwide, and we must use diplomacy to catalyze political will.

One such way is by leveraging trade agreements and trade policy to press countries and regions which account for a sizeable portion of the consumption, illegal take and trade of wildlife and wildlife products to uphold their commitments to combat wildlife trafficking and strengthen wildlife conservation. Indeed, the Administration is pursuing such obligations in the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) with eleven other countries in the Asia-Pacific region accounting for an estimated \$ 8-10 billion in illegal wildlife trade, as well as the Transatlantic Partnership Agreement (T-TIP) negotiations with the European Union (EU).

These commitments would be fully enforceable, including through recourse to trade sanctions, which will be a powerful incentive for parties to match words with action.

We have also advocated for countries to work together against wildlife trafficking in a number of multilateral fora, including the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, or APEC, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, the G-7, the UN General Assembly, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. We have also pressed the African Union, the African Development Bank, and multiple Regional Economic Communities in Africa to mobilize efforts to combat wildlife trafficking. We worked with our mission to the U.N. to secure the inclusion of language to address wildlife trafficking in two Security Council Resolutions sanctioning African armed groups, which were adopted in January 2014. APEC has committed to addressing wildlife trafficking in Declarations for the last three years, and in 2014 and 2015 is conducting follow-on programming, with State Department support, to build capacity in the region to reduce demand and strengthen enforcement. The 2014 East Asia Summit, attended by the United States, ASEAN, and other nations, produced a Declaration on Combating Wildlife Trafficking focused on strengthening regional enforcement cooperation and upholding commitments under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

We are expanding our efforts to raise wildlife trafficking at all levels of our bilateral diplomatic and development engagement with foreign governments. U.S. Ambassadors and USAID Mission Directors in African countries and other State Department and USAID principals have encouraged high-level African government officials to take concrete steps to protect their wildlife, prevent trafficking and the corruption it breeds, and promote opportunity and development for communities. Building on these efforts, the Secretary of the Interior hosted a U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit Signature Event, a *Dialogue on Combating Wildlife Trafficking*, on August 4, 2014, which convened key African heads of state and foreign ministers to elevate wildlife conservation as a national priority and encourage African leadership and regional collaboration as essential components for efforts to stop poaching and trafficking at the source.

## **Conclusion**

Combating wildlife trafficking is a complex challenge which demands a multi-faceted and whole-of-government approach. Within the framework of the National

Strategy and the Implementation Plan, we are working across the U.S. Government to focus our international investments to combat wildlife trafficking in the most strategic and effective way possible.

We appreciate your support and interest essential to our efforts. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.