



Countering Multi-Billion dollar Illegal Wildlife Trade Focus of Government-Backed Global Coalition

Measures Include Combating Poaching, Training of Customs Officers to Consumer Awareness

Nairobi, 10 February 2007 -- A new global initiative to fight the US\$10 billion illegal trade in wildlife was launched today on the international stage.

The Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT) aims to counter the poachers, smugglers and dealers whose activities threaten the very existence of many endangered animals.

The Coalition -- an alliance of governments, conservation groups, industry and scientists -- plans to boost wildlife enforcement, reduce consumer demand for illegally traded wildlife and catalyze high-level political support to end the illegal trade.

Claudia McMurray, Assistant Secretary at the United States Department of State, said at the launch in Nairobi, Kenya: "Wildlife is a precious resource to people of all countries. It is also an important asset in many developing countries generating income through activities such as tourism".

"In Kenya, where we are making this announcement, the country earns around US\$700 million a year in tourism revenues much of which is focused on preservation of wildlife and its habitat," she added.

"Kenya has developed a good system of anti-poaching and enforcement of wildlife-related laws and treaties. But there are many developing countries that urgently need assistance to counter the threats -- threats that are undermining the international target to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002," said Ms. McMurray.

Experts claim the illegal trade is also a human health issue with trafficking contributing to the spread of highly virulent diseases such as Ebola, SARs and, more recently, avian influenza.

The trade, which includes animals for the pet trade and animal parts like tusks and tiger bone is often closely tied to organized crime and the clandestine smuggling routes used by those trafficking in drugs, arms and people.

“It is estimated that the black market in wildlife world-wide could be worth some US\$10 billion annually, perhaps even twice that amount. Working together through the Coalition, we are committed to putting an end to this criminal activity.”

Indian Minister of Environment and Forests Mr. A. Raja said, “India is one of the worst victims of international wildlife crime and it has been our endeavor to strengthen measures to combat wildlife crime both through domestic actions and multilateral and bilateral cooperation. India, being a founding partner to the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT), is deeply committed to join hands with like-minded parties in strengthening efforts to curb wildlife crime. Considering the scale of the problem and the range of factors contributing to it, a multi-pronged strategy is required to address wildlife crime in a more effective and professional manner. We expect that the CAWT shall provide a platform for promoting collaboration between member countries and civil society for promoting public engagement against wildlife crime.”

Barry Gardiner, the UK Minister for Biodiversity, said: “The UK Government abhors the illegal trade in wildlife and is firmly committed to the fight to stamp it out, but individual countries cannot combat wildlife crime alone”.

“I am delighted that the CAWT initiative has brought us all together, to signal our commitment to the Coalition, and our determination to work together to combat the illegal wildlife trade. Both producing and consuming countries are represented – demonstrating how important it is that we work together, respecting the needs and aspirations of both perspectives,” he added

The Coalition will support the effective implementation of wildlife-related treaties including the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), whose secretariat is administered by UNEP.

The Coalition, launched at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), includes the governments of Australia, the Republic of India, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Partner organizations include the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the American Forest and Paper Association, the Cheetah Conservation Fund, Conservation International, Humane Society International, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Save the Tiger Fund, Smithsonian Institution, Traffic International, WildAid, Wildlife Alliance, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Fund.

Notes to Editors – Statistics on the Illegal Trade in Wildlife

Attempts have been made by several international organizations, including Interpol and WWF, to define the scale of the international illegal wildlife trade. However, there are many difficulties with this task and the resulting estimates cover an extremely broad range from 25%-70% of the legal trade.

TRAFFIC International (a joint programme of WWF and IUCN which monitors the trade in wildlife) have suggested that the value of the illegal trade based on declared import figures from the early 1990s (excluding timber and fisheries) could range from L2.25 billion to L6.3 billion.

However, the covert nature of smuggling and difficulties in detecting illegal shipments mean it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the scale of these illegal activities with some estimates as high as US\$10 billion or more.