

Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT): Meeting of Governments

The State Apartments, Clarence House, London
Tuesday 21st May 2013, 1.30pm

Chair's Summary

Introduction

The Government of the United Kingdom hosted a meeting on 21st May of 22 Governments from key range, transit and destination countries¹ affected by the illegal wildlife trade, as well as relevant multilateral organisations². The meeting followed a Conference earlier in the day which included expert presentations on this subject, as well as speeches by HRH The Prince of Wales, The Duke of Cambridge, and the Rt. Hon Owen Paterson MP, UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. HRH The Prince of Wales and the Rt Hon Owen Paterson also spoke at the opening of the Government meeting.

The aim of the meeting was to initiate a wide-ranging discussion on how actions by Governments and multilateral organisations could have a significant and rapid impact on the illegal wildlife trade, with a focus on three aspects: tackling law enforcement and criminal justice issues; demand reduction; and, supporting the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods in the affected communities. The meeting was structured around these topics, with countries and organisations providing examples both of successes and of the scale of the remaining challenges, as well as clarifying the scope for further collaborative action. The conclusions of each session are set out below, based on the summary given by the Chair of the meeting, Richard Benyon MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Natural Environment, Water and Rural Affairs, UK.

The scale of the global illegal wildlife trade market is huge, with estimates ranging from US\$8-10billion annually. The poaching of endangered species which feeds this trade is continuing to increase at an alarming rate: in the first five months of 2013 alone, the number of rhinos poached in South Africa already stands at 386, a rate of nearly 3 a day and a 30 fold increase on the total for 2007. Current levels of illegal killing of African elephants for their ivory pose a real threat of extinction for certain populations. These illegal activities are carried out on a global scale, with increasing involvement of organised criminal syndicates and militias, constituting a real threat to national and international security as well as social and economic development opportunities in the countries affected.

¹ Australia, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, United Kingdom, USA, and Vietnam.

² CITES, UNEP, World Bank, INTERPOL, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Customs Organization (WCO), World Tourism Organisation, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, EUROPOL, EU Wildlife Enforcement Working Group, LATF Lusaka Agreement Task Force.

Role of Governments in tackling law enforcement and criminal justice issues

- 1) There is a need for a single co-ordinated international approach building on the work already undertaken through CITES and other international fora. This needs to support and promote cross-border co-operation. A platform for the development of a series of separate initiatives is not what is needed.
- 2) Political commitment will be key to ensure law enforcement. Wildlife crime needs to be higher on the law enforcement agenda and across all arms of Government.
- 3) Improving international co-operation and positively engaging multilateral organisations will be essential, including Interpol, Europol, UNDP, UNEP and UNODC. Networks, including regional networks, for co-operation and data sharing between enforcement agencies already exist, but there is a need to consider if we can do more to build on these. This should include sharing good practice, technology and techniques, not just on wildlife trafficking but drawing on experience from other areas of law enforcement, such as drugs trafficking. National Governments need to press for this issue to be given sufficient priority in the relevant multilateral organisations.
- 4) The illegal wildlife trade is a national security and organised crime issue at least as much as an environmental issue, and needs to be treated as such by Governments and others.

Role of Governments in demand reduction

- 1) Examples from both the morning conference and the Government meeting demonstrated that public awareness and engagement can have a demonstrable impact on the illegal wildlife trade, for instance the significant fall in shark fin consumption in China brought about by active collaboration between the Wild Aid organisation and the Chinese Government.
- 2) There is a need when tackling demand reduction to get both the message and the messenger right: Governments are not necessarily best placed to lead such behaviour change campaigns, so partnerships will be essential. Successful examples include the use of high profile figures and all forms of media, including social media. The current UK government public engagement campaign “If They’re Gone” is a good example.
- 3) A single global approach is neither practical nor desirable as action needs to be tailored to local circumstances/audiences – but there is the role for the international community to provide technical and financial support and to share best practice.

Role of Governments in supporting the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods

- 1) Inspiring examples exist of action undertaken by Governments working with local communities to promote sustainable livelihoods in a way which also supports conservation of iconic endangered species, such as elephants.

- 2) There is however a need to understand the economic and social context in each locality – strategies won't work unless communities have a stake and there is shared ownership of initiatives.
- 3) An important driver for the illegal wildlife trade is rural poverty, and there is a clear need to ensure that species conservation initiatives are mainstreamed into development policy by both donor and recipient Governments, as well as by multilateral organisations.

Next Steps: Working in partnership within and between Governments, multilateral organisations and others

- 1) There is an urgent need to demonstrate global leadership and strengthen international co-ordination to ensure a step change in the effort and resources applied to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.
- 2) There is a need to build upon the good examples from the day and the substantial work already underway in a number of fora. It will be important to work within the framework of and to build upon international agreements and relevant national initiatives.
- 3) Critically, the issue of illegal wildlife trafficking needs to move from being a 'niche' environmental issue to one which is recognised by governments at the highest levels, as an essential part of ensuring national and international security and stability.

Concluding Remarks

- 1) In thanking all the participants for their excellent contributions to an important discussion, the Chair concluded that this was an ambitious agenda on which there was an urgent need for collaborative action. Success in eradicating the illegal wildlife trade would require a strengthening of the political will of the international community as a whole, and a sharpened focus on the key priorities identified at this meeting.
- 2) The Chair welcomed the enthusiasm of all those around the table to work together to this end, and confirmed that the British Government - with the involvement of HRH The Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge - was committed to hosting a meeting before the end of 2013, aimed at the highest levels of Government, and, to agreed on an ambitious agenda of effective action to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.