

Blood Ivory, Organized Crime and Terrorism

People do care about elephants being killed in Africa, but most do not fully realize how this ongoing slaughter may yet impact their lives. Ivory is extremely valuable as a conflict resource, funding not just civil and tribal wars within Africa, but also global terrorism.

The United States government believes most wildlife trafficking is the result of organized crime linked to terrorism, with black market ivory and rhino horn worth s USD\$ 8billion a year.

“Stopping poaching is no longer only about protecting the planet’s natural resources. It is also a national security issue, a public health issue and an economic security issue,” warned previous U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The U.S. State Department November 2012 meeting ‘Wildlife Trafficking and Conservation: A Call to Action’ was initially prompted by of a suspected link between the illegal trade of wildlife and terrorist groups like al-Shabaab and al Qaeda.

Wildlife products, such as ivory and rhino horn, have increased substantially in value because of the increase in wealth of Asian nations, especially China.

The funding secured through the illegal sale of wildlife products is used as an untraceable form of currency by terrorist groups and represents a significant source of illegal revenue. This growing lucrative black market joins terrorism to crime syndicates.

In a statement in December 2012, CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) stated, "The illegal killings of large number of elephants for their ivory are increasingly involving organised crime and in some cases well-armed rebel militias."

In areas where governments are unable to provide basic security for their own citizens, rangers and elephants in remote game reserves and conservation areas are particularly vulnerable.

Co-operation and intelligence sharing with law enforcement internationally is seen as the most effective way to combat the ivory trade, as it is with drug trafficking.

The slaughter of elephants and rhinos is happening on such a massive scale in Africa that the animals’ very existence is threatened.

Rangers don’t necessarily know infantry tactics and they’re up against hardened soldiers who’ve been drawn into this ivory trade because the profits are so high.

Rebel groups, such as the Lord’s Resistance Army that originated in Uganda, have gravitated up to Congo , engaging in the mass slaughtering of elephants for their ‘white gold’.

Throughout Africa the poaching crisis continues unabated, with mass killings reported in Kenya, Tanzania, Cameroon, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

Militias operate with relative impunity and the inability of governments to control much of their own territory, let alone multiple borders, makes any form of viable control and protection virtually impossible.

Pratik Patel from Tanzania-based The African Wildlife Trust is available to speak on the endangered wildlife trafficking epidemic.

He is promoting a deeper understanding of this crisis and is raising funds to enable specialized intelligence-led anti-poaching units and teams of conservation consultants to focus on proactive, effective wildlife law enforcement.

AWT 's strategy is to form alliances with ngo's, non-profits, international governmental and conservation organizations to link global intelligence systems, conservation groups and military forces in the war against poaching.

Mr. Patel's family have been involved in conservation for over four decades. He will be in the U.S. during September 2014 promoting AWT. He welcomes the opportunity to meet with any concerned groups and organizations and to use whatever media can be made available to him to further the awareness of the plight of the African elephant and other wildlife.

Pratik is willing to travel to any location in the U.S. to promote this cause. Please let us know if you are able to assist his efforts by putting him in contact with radio, television or newspaper reporters or by hosting him at one of your membership functions. Any assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Contact:

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Resources:

- *Keith Somerville, School of Politics and International Studies, University of Kent; Editor of Africa - News and Analysis.*
- *Samuel Burke, CNN, 01-2013]*