

FORUM: Environment Committee

ISSUE: The Question of Illegal Trade and Protection of Wildlife Species

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Introduction

The issue of illegal wildlife species trade has been worsened due to lax law enforcement, weak border control and the perception of low risk and high profitability. Illicit wildlife trade is globally said to be the third most valuable illegal trade compared to drugs and arms. Poachers who obtain the wildlife species often do not have qualms about causing pollutants and deteriorating the conditions of the environment. These problems often result in a nation's resources being deconditioned and thus affect the economy that is based on the nation's resources.

In response to this issue, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), also known as the Washington Convention, is an international agreement between governments drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). CITES is one of the largest conservation agreements in existence. However, participation is voluntary and not internationally binding but rather provides a framework that states may adopt at a domestic, national level. Another international organization that ensures that the trade of wildlife species is not a threat to the conservation of nature is TRAFFIC, which is a joint programme of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). TRAFFIC also works closely to CITES whenever possible.

Recently, illegal wildlife species trade has been more prominent in South-east Asia, namely China and Vietnam.

Regional organizations such as ASEAN and the EU have also stepped up to confront this issue.

If the issue at hand is not resolved amicably, the environment would slowly turn into a wasteland with poachers and hunters using pollutants, introduction of invasive threats and the destruction of the habitat would be at stake. The chains of wildlife extinction would thus be a rippling, domino effect, resulting in complete annihilation of nature and wildlife species.

Key Terms

Illegal Trade

Refers to the marketing, exchanging, purchase or sale of a commodity against a legally binding statute of a state or an international body which makes such activity against the law.

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| <i>Protection</i> | Refers to the conservation or preservation of a subject at matter and the insurance of the subject's safety. |
| <i>Wildlife Species</i> | Refers to all undomesticated animals, plants and other organism. |

Background of the Issue

The illegal trade of wildlife species, the despicable sale of undomesticated wildlife species demonstrates a complete abuse of wildlife species and disregards the species' life form. These species, namely animals, would usually result to become exotic pets, domesticated showcase commodities or extracted for usage in craft or human benefits.

The direct cause of the increase of illegal wildlife species trade is due to rare undomesticated animals or plant life fetching a high price being sold in habitats where such species are scarce. Grave examples of trade of wildlife species include but are not limited to leopard skin, falcon eggs, rhinoceroses, tiger bones and ivory, as stated by TRAFFIC in their seizure reports from 1997 to 2010. Reports from the World Wildlife Organisation states that up to 12,000 African elephants are illegally killed each year to supply domestic ivory markets. Three out of seven species of marine turtles are now critically endangered.

Paradoxically, demands of these wildlife species are at its peak in the United States of America, the Peoples Republic of China, and the European Union. These result in the government themselves bringing up the situation and treating it with great importance. An example as reported by TRAFFIC would be the European Union Action plan in December 2006 and June 2007. In December 2006, EU Environment Ministers formally acknowledged the need for EU assistance in promoting the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife in developing countries and effective implementation of the CITES Convention. In June 2007, the EC launched an Action Plan to improve wildlife trade enforcement within the EU and, crucially, in countries where the trade originates.

The competence of the government of countries where illegal wildlife species trade continues to proliferate is heavily questioned. The proliferation of such acts can be due to the fact that the country has weak laws and the disregard of the wildlife species. A weak government or a government that disregards wildlife species would thus result in a country where such illegal wildlife species trade, which could lead to biodiversity complications and environmental deterioration in a country to occur.

Possible solutions to the Issue

A weak government would result in weak solution and poor laws that may not remedy the problem at hand. Possible solutions like tightening border security and clamping down on such criminals to protect the wildlife species as well to protect the environment of a country are possible. Other possible solutions can include the Interpol to tighten trade security between waters of countries. This would thus reduce the supply of the wildlife species to the demanding country.

A way to cut the demand could possibly be the education of the people to inculcate and to create awareness about the detrimental effect of the wildlife trade. Another way could be to understand their culture and to offer alternatives to the use of illegal wildlife species.

Developed countries are the principal importers of illegally traded wildlife, while LDCs are the principal suppliers of illegally traded wildlife. Addressing the problem in both import and export countries is essential to stopping such trade.

Aside from the demand and the supply, member states could increase the trade border laws and require more national stringent checks. As with the issue on protection, member states can ensure the protection of animals by sending research scientists and zoologists to the wildlife habitat of the source countries to carry out checks on the evidence of wildlife smuggling. Such measures as providing healthcare to species, gathering species to ensure that they are known to be endangered and to confirm their threatened state, to ensure the habitat would be free of smugglers or poachers through investigations, further investigations can be done when smuggling or poaching has been carried out in the particular habitat. The government can also set up a separate department of promoting the ban of wildlife trade.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Ecuador and Latin America

Latin America is extremely vulnerable to wildlife smuggling because of its immense biodiversity. Ecuador, the second smallest South American country is home to 1600 species of birds, this is more than the entire continental United States. In South America there are many rare and colourful birds such as the Scarlet Macaw, which are in high demand for wildlife smugglers. Most animals stolen in Latin America often end up in Europe, the United States and Japan. In Ecuador there is no lack of laws against wildlife smuggling, but there is a lack of resources, which means that conservation is not a first priority. It is a hope in Ecuador that a turn to tourism will become an alternative to hunting and illegal trade of rare and endangered wildlife. Trade of wildlife in the United States of America is thus the second largest black market, after drugs.

Peoples' Republic of China

The Chinese authorities have shared intelligence on the seizures with enforcement agencies operating in the region, including INTERPOL, World Customs Organization (WCO) and ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network. TRAFFIC reported a year ago that rising demand for pangolins, mostly from mainland China, compounded by lax laws was wiping out pangolins from their native habitats in Southeast Asia.

Australia

The Australian government has already imposed the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (the EPBC Act). This provides a legal framework

to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places.

New Zealand

The Wildlife Enforcement Group, a group of three government departments, collectively investigates smuggling to and from New Zealand. The three agencies are the New Zealand Customs Service, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Department of Conservation. The existence of these groups and departments is due to New Zealand having a number of rare and endangered species and the abundant cases of wildlife smuggling. They are also a signatory of CITES, administered by the Department of Conservation.

United Nations Environment Programme

To combat the problem, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) organized The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1973. This convention is an international agreement between governments aimed at ensuring that the international trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

The international wildlife trade endangers hundreds of millions of plant and animal specimens each year - but when a particular species is listed under CITES, a management plan is created for governments to monitor and sustainably manage that plant or animal.

International Union for Conservation of Nature

The IUCN supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world and brings governments, non-government organizations, United Nations agencies, companies and local communities together to develop and implement policy, laws and best practice. IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental network - a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by more than 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

IUCN and CITES Timeline of Events

1900. London Convention Designed to Ensure Conservation of Various Species of Wild Animals in Africa Which Are Useful to Man or Inoffensive.

1911. North Pacific Fur Seal Convention.
Regulated over-exploitation of fur seals at sea and on land. Pribilof Islands off Alaska.

1933. London Convention Relative to the Preservation of Fauna and Flora in Their Natural State.

1940. The Washington Convention on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere. Washington, D.C.

1946. International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling. Washington, D.C.

1948. Birth of the IUPN.

International Union for the Protection of Nature (IUPN), forerunner of IUCN, founded at Fontainebleau, France. Backed by U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

1949. First United Nations Conservation Conference.

U.N. Scientific Conference on the Conservation and Utilization of Resources (UNSCCUR). Lake Success, Long Island, New York. Aldo Leopold, America's prophet of "sustainable yield" and "wise-use conservation."

IUPN-UNESCO Conference on the Protection of Nature.

Held in parallel with UNSCCUR, it called for international legislation "to maintain nature's equilibrium" and listed "gravely endangered species."

1956. IUPN becomes IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

1960. IUCN General Assembly resolution called for international convention regulating trade in endangered wildlife species.

1963. IUCN called for convention regulating "export, transit, and import of rare or threatened wildlife species or their skins or trophies."

1964. IUCN prepared a first draft of a convention.

1965. IUCN met with U.N. and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and drafted a trade convention on endangered species.

1967. IUCN sent draft of convention to the U.N.

1969. IUCN sent second draft to the U.N. and prepared a list of species to be covered by the convention.

Other Calls for an Endangered Species Convention

U.S. Endangered Species Conservation Act (ESA).

Amendments called for an international ministerial meeting to create a binding convention on the conservation of endangered species.

1972. U.N. Conference on the Human Environment.

Known as the Stockholm Conference, it recommended the establishment of the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP).

1973. Birth of CITES, the Washington Convention.

A Plenipotentiary Conference to Conclude an International Convention on Trade in

Certain Species of Wildlife met in Washington, D.C. Representatives from 80 nations debated for 3 weeks.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora---Preamble, 25 Articles, Appendices I, II, and III (listing all orchids) and IV (providing a model permit)---was signed on March 3, 1973, by 21 nations. The U.N. required 10 ratifications by national governments before the treaty could enter into force.

1974. IUCN Threatened Plants Committee.

IUCN established the Committee to gather data on threatened plant species worldwide.

1975. CITES Entry into Force.

CITES entered into force as a U.N. treaty with the tenth ratification by a signatory country (Canada). Other charter Parties to the treaty were Chile, Cyprus, Ecuador, Nigeria, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, USA, and Uruguay.

1976. First CITES Conference of Parties

Berne, Switzerland. Adopted the Berne Criteria for listing species, which required evaluation of both biological and trade status.

1979. Second CITES Conference of Parties

San Jose, Costa Rica. Defined "artificially propagated." Called Extraordinary Meeting at Bonn, Germany, on financing.

1981. Third CITES Conference of Parties

New Delhi, India. Adopted CITES elephant logo. Established Technical Committee (forerunner of Animals Committee and Plants Committee).

1983. Fourth CITES Conference of Parties

Gaborone, Botswana. Discussed Trophy Hunting Paradox---that hunting revenue could fund conservation of natural habitats.

World Commission on Environment and Development.

Known as the Brundtland Commission, it would set the agenda for the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development of 1992.

1985. Fifth CITES Conference of Parties

Buenas Aires, Argentina. 10th Anniversary of CITES. First decade of treaty was spent debating how the treaty should be operated and which species should be listed. The trend was to uplist species in the Appendices.

1987. Sixth CITES Conference of Parties

Ottawa, Canada. Established CITES Plants Committee to advise on biological and trade information on plant species. PC members are elected from each CITES region by Conference of the Parties.

1989. Seventh CITES Conference of Parties

Lausanne, Switzerland. Placed all Paphiopedilum and Phragmipedium species on Appendix I and established a CITES Plants Officer.

1992. Eighth CITES Conference of the Parties

Discussed listing commodity species, such as timber trees. Began developing new criteria for listing species.

The Earth Summit.

The U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), known as the Earth Summit. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Agenda prepared by the Brundtland Commission. The Summit adopted Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

1994. Ninth CITES Conference of the Parties

Resolution 9.24 (based on the Precautionary Principle) required restrictions if a threatened species may be affected by trade or if a species may become threatened by trade.

1997. Tenth CITES Conference of the Parties

Harare, Zimbabwe. Resolution on the CITES-CBD Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1996. Reviewed effectiveness study that found "impact of CITES on the conservation status of individual species is very complex and cannot be measured easily or precisely."

1999. Ninth Meeting of the CITES Plants Committee.

Darwin, Australia. Orchidaceae to be next group reviewed for appropriateness of listing species. Launched "CITES and Plants--A User's Guide" with color slides and text.

2000. 11th CITES Conference of the Parties

Gigiri, Kenya. Resolution 11.11 stated that flaked seedlings, produced in a manner intensively manipulated by human intervention, cannot be considered taken from the wild.

2001. First International Orchid Conservation Congress.

Perth, Australia. Sponsored by the IUCN/SSC Orchid Specialist Group, it established an In Situ Conservation Committee to promote knowledge needed to determine if orchid populations are self-sustainable or require human intervention.

2002. 12th CITES Conference of the Parties

Santiago, Chile. Established Memorandum of Understanding with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Relevant past UN resolutions and UN treaties

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (AKA Bonn Convention or CMS). The two conventions and resolutions are not UN based, but are UN-backed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Appendix and Bibliography

Information on global wildlife trade

<http://www.worldwildlife.org/what/globalmarkets/wildlifetrade/index.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildlife_smuggling

TRAFFIC and EU's actions to wildlife trade

<http://www.traffic.org/asean-wen/>

USA Wildlife Trade situation

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/07/070725-animal-smuggle.html>

China's pangolin smuggling

<http://blogs.nationalgeographic.com/blogs/news/chiefeditor/2010/07/china-seizes-thousands-of-dead.html>

New Zealand Wildlife trade

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildlife_smuggling_in_New_Zealand

<http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/>

The Bonn Convention

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_the_Conservation_of_Migratory_Species_of_Wild_Animals

Timeline of the IUCN and CITES

<http://www.unep.org/documents.multilingual/default.asp?DocumentID=443&ArticleID=4827&l=en>

ICUN Overview

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IUCN>