



# **ODUMUNC 39**

Economic and Social Council

Fighting International Poaching

By: Renée van den Brink



## *Fighting International Poaching*

by: *Reneé van den Brink*

Groningen University, Netherlands

### **Introduction**

In the last ten years poaching as emerged as a major threat to endangered species, especially in Africa, as well as in parts of Asia, Central and South America. Poaching is fueled by growing global wealth (*demand*), creating lucrative markets for animal parts. The ability to sell animal parts (*supply*) is driven by poverty and weapons proliferation. It can be a major source of income to poor hunters in many regions. And it has become much easier with the global proliferation of high-power rifles, especially Kalashnikov rifles (AK47s) in many regions of the world. Poachers are much more capable and dangerous, posing a serious threat to the safety game wardens, whom they often attack.

The issue rose to the top of the international agenda in 2015, with a new General Assembly resolution, the first on the topic, dedicated to protection of global biodiversity.<sup>1</sup> The resolution leaves much unsaid, including a definition of poaching, still very controversial.

What is universally accepted is poaching endangers important species. Every year thousands of animals are killed for individual body parts. Tusks, pelts, and

bones are sold for immense amounts of money. The poaching industry is driven mainly for trophy killings, extraction of coveted resources, and the folk-medical industry (mostly in Asia). Rhinoceros horn, for example, is a popular aphrodisiac and cure for diseases such as cancer. Myths like these drove rhino horn prices to over USD 30,000 per pound, making it more valuable than gold (USD 22,000 per pound). The demand for this and similar animal products creates a large underground market that undermines the laws of countries and endangers species. Poachers are willing to take the risk to get rich. African wildlife is suffering tremendously; where there were 5-10 million African elephants in the 1930s, there are about 50,000 to 100,000 today (one percent). Of the dozen rhino species existing then, only 5 remain. At this moment, the lion, African elephant, Grevy's zebra, black rhino, and mountain gorilla are endangered species because of poaching. Currently the UN focuses on the two species with the highest death rates: the African elephant and black rhino.

In order to save wildlife on Earth, the UN must do more to solve issues such as poaching. If we do not protect our planet's wildlife it may go extinct. But major issues must be resolved to protect these animals while working to end illegal poaching and smuggling. These include:

*What poaching is:*

- Illegal, unlicensed killing of legally protected animals. Poaching usually involves attacks on endangered

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/69/314 on *Tackling the Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife*; [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/314](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/314) Also the official press release *Speakers Call for Concerted Action to Crush Multibillion-Dollar Illicit Wildlife Trade as General Assembly Adopts Sweeping Text*, United Nations, 30 July 2015; <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11666.doc.htm>

## Issue Brief for the for the Economic and Social Council Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

species in game reserves. They may be hunted for food, as dangers or nuisances, for body parts or for sport.

- International trade in animal parts such as elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn, a major incentive for poaching, especially in poor countries, and exotic bird feathers in Central and South America.
- Local attacks on large animals, such as elephants, lions, seals, tigers, wolves. Large animals can compete with people for food and games, whether in declining fisheries where seals feed, or by destroying crops, a major issue for elephants, by attacking livestock as can lions and wolves, or endangering human life, as can major predators such as lions and tigers.
- Poaching also can be a source of income for insurgencies. A well-known example is the Lord's Resistance Army, based in Uganda and surrounding countries, which relies on poaching of elephant ivory for operating money.<sup>2</sup>
- Trapping of legally protected wild animals—especially exotic birds—for sale as pets, often to foreign countries.

*What poaching isn't, usually meant to include:*

- Legally permitted hunting, including licensed hunting on game reserves.

- Legally permitted killing of excess wildlife (culling) by game wardens and their agents.
- Legally permitted destruction of troublesome individual animals or groups of animals to suppress predation against livestock and threats to human life.

*Grey areas (to be decided by the United Nations):*

- Commercial overfishing, taking fish beyond official limits within regulated fisheries.<sup>3</sup>
- State-sponsored hunting of internationally protected animals (such as Japanese and Norwegian whaling) which is legal under national law, but illegal under international law.

### **Framing incident: Cecil the Lion**

Poaching is of constant interest mostly to poachers and traders directly engaged in the illicit trade in forbidden animal parts, animal protection police (game wardens), and a small number of activists. For most people it is an intermittent interest, something they focus on only under special circumstances. For law enforcement officials, this means a specific criminal investigation. For the public and most policy makers, it requires a

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<sup>2</sup> 'Lord's Resistance Army Update', *Human Security Baseline Assessment*, 5 October 2015, <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures/south-sudan/lra.html>

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<sup>3</sup> *Overfishing: a threat to marine biodiversity*, Nairobi: United Nations Environmental Programme, n.d.; <http://www.un.org/events/tenstories/06/story.asp?storyID=800>

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highly visible *framing incident* to capture attention and create a desire to act.

An important framing incident came on 1 July 2015, when the killing of a locally-famous Lion in Zimbabwe was reported. Cecil was a male Southwest African lion, killed by an arrow and gunshot by Walter Palmer, an American recreational big-game hunter. It is estimated there are 25,000 to 30,000 lions alive in Africa, and smaller populations in South Asia and the Middle East, as well as in captivity. The lion is not an endangered species, and the killing of this lion may have been legal; much is in dispute. The harsh international condemnation is less ambiguous and helped lead to demands for better restrictions on poaching.<sup>4</sup>

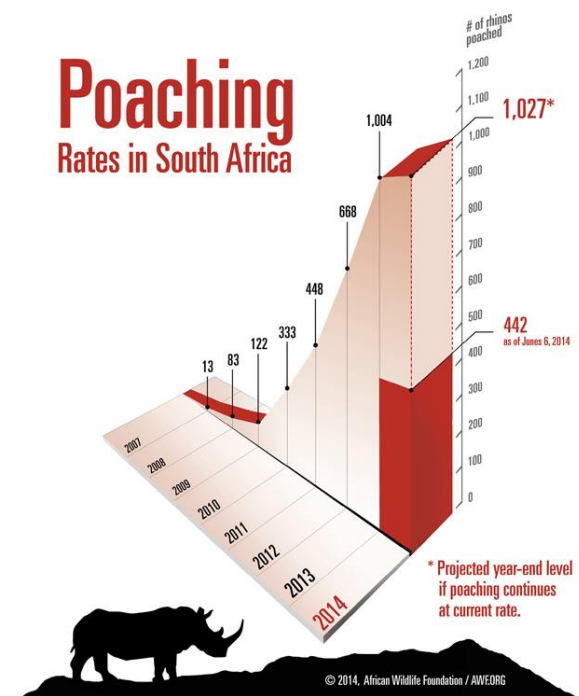
As this incident showed, the line between poaching and legal killing can be blurred, especially as a result of corruption, where hunters—often foreign, especially from the United States where big game hunting remains popular—receive legal hunting permits through bribery. The bribery usually is done by local hunting tour managers, insulating the visiting hunters from difficulty or any legal consequences.

The incident also showed how data on poaching also is very poor. The most reliable data is based on body counts of large animals such as elephants and rhinoceros, left after their valuable body parts were removed by poachers. Other poaching totals are estimates, often vague.

<sup>4</sup> "US man accused in African lion death thought hunt was legal". *The New York Times*, 28 July 2015; <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/world/africa/american-hunter-is-accused-of-killing-cecil-a-beloved-lion-in-zimbabwe.html>

### Ivory trade

In 1989 the international trade ivory was banned, after the number of African elephants was halved from 1.2 million to 600,000. However, the now illegal trade of ivory continued. Especially in Asia, the demand of ivory remains. Especially poor African countries such as Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe, traders have tried to weaken the ban in order to boost their economy with ivory trade. Even though multiple organizations tried to spread awareness of the critical condition of African elephants, the ivory trade continues.



### Dead rhino's as a trophy

The poaching of rhinoceros has caught greater attention, since the species is endangered. The number of rhinos killed by

**Issue Brief for the for the Economic and Social Council  
Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice**

poachers began to rise in 2008 when 83 were confirmed killed in South Africa alone. In 2013 the UN attempted to take serious measurement against poaching, as a reaction to the rising death rates. Individuals involved with wildlife crime now face sanctions and high fines. South Africa is considered the leading country in rhino poaching. One of the most difficult aspects of this problem is that about 20-25 per cent of rhinoceros in South Africa are possessed privately, where they can be legally hunted.

Trophy hunting in South Africa alone attracts approximately 9,000 hunters each year. Most of the animals they kill are bred especially for hunting. With this hunting industry South Africa earns more than USD 744 million each year. Trophy hunting also creates 70,000 jobs. Those are enough reasons for South Africa to continue (legal) trophy hunting. However there are a lot of objections, mostly from the rest of the world. Many argue that the legal killing of animals also encourages illegal killing and activity.

### **The situation in Asia**

Not only in Africa poaching is a problem. Asia is also dealing with problems that come with illegal killing and selling of wildlife. The Asian elephant, rhino and tiger are popular targets are vulnerable, as are smaller animals like endangered butterflies, birds, turtles, seahorses, reptiles and monkeys. A lot of those smaller animals are popular in Europe, Japan, the United States and other parts of the world as pets. Most of these animals are exported from Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

The Asian wildlife trading business is often controlled by criminal gangs. Especially the illegal trafficking in live great apes is becoming a serious problem. Orangutans in Asia (and African apes such as chimpanzees, gorillas and bonobos) are under severe threat. Wildlife crime in Asia (supply) is less discussed at the UN compared to wildlife crime in Africa. This does not mean that it is less of a problem, since small animals and plants continue to be illegally trafficked out of Asia.

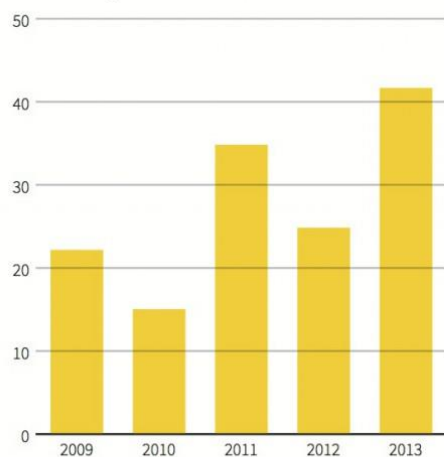
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### Ivory seizures and elephant poaching in Africa

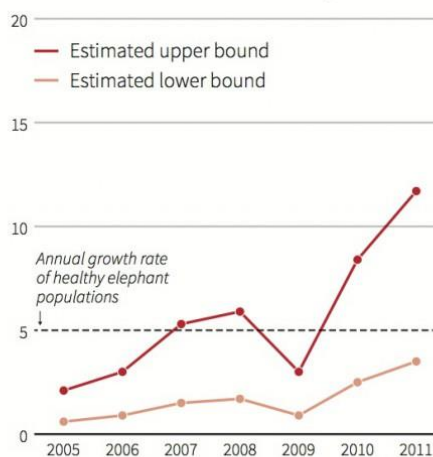
Elephant poaching levels in Africa have exceeded over 5 percent of the total population — a tipping point as killings are now exceeding the animal's natural growth rate.

**WEIGHT OF LARGE-SCALE IVORY SEIZURES\***

Thousand kg



**ANNUAL PROPORTION OF ELEPHANT POPULATIONS KILLED ILLEGALLY\*\***, Percent



\*Large-scale seizures = More than 500kg. 2013 data through Nov. 15.\*\*In sites monitored by MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants). Source: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

C.Chan 03/01/2013

REUTERS

#### What the United Nations does

Poaching is not a new issue, but it has been a difficult one for the Member States of the UN. The basic statement of international law is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITE), a treaty negotiated in 1973.<sup>5</sup> CITE aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species in the wild, and it accords varying degrees of protection to more than 35,000 species of animals and plants.

With 181 States Party out of 193 UN Member States, it is a widely accepted international agreement between

<sup>5</sup> The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITE); <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CITES>

governments. The treaty respects the sovereignty of adhering states, and calls for them to apply domestic law to protect endangered species and stop illegal trafficking in endangered animals and parts. Participation is good but highly imperfect, and enforcement can be ambivalent or weak.

In March this year Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said the international community must act more aggressively. Not only does poaching undermines illegal wildlife trade the law and weakens it our ecosystem, it also damages the attempts from local communities to manage their natural sources. According to Mr. Ban, fighting wildlife crime will help achieving peace and security in areas that are conflicted because of wildlife crime. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) started by

## Issue Brief for the for the Economic and Social Council Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

launching new initiatives to stop illegal wildlife trade in both Africa and Asia.

Previously the UN studied and reported on these issues. It continues to authorize studies of poaching and the trade in poached animals and parts, usually turning to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) based in Vienna. On 30 July 2015 the UN made its biggest step ever to protect wildlife. The resolution, the first on the topic, urges Member States to fight against illegal trade on both the supply and demand side.<sup>6</sup> The UN recognized that wild animals and plants are an “irreplaceable part of the natural systems of the Earth”. The resolution does not define poaching. Instead it calls on Member States to harmonize their laws.

Critics believe this is unlikely, since there is no mechanism for harmonization to occur, like a major international conference. Many member states also remain skeptical of the resolution, hesitant to devote money for combatting poaching when other more sensitive problems like drug trafficking and economic development remain to be solved too.

### Proposals for further action

*Further study of the issue.* This is classical delaying ploy, favored by countries where consumption of poached animal products is

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<sup>6</sup> UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/69/314 on *Tackling the Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife*; [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/314](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/314) Also the official press release, *Speakers Call for Concerted Action to Crush Multibillion-Dollar Illicit Wildlife Trade as General Assembly Adopts Sweeping Text*, United Nations, 30 July 2015; <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11666.doc.htm>

high, especially in Asia and the Middle East. Studies can be justified to better determine the size of the problem, to find ways to increase threatened populations, and to investigate alternatives to poached animal products.

*Better law enforcement coordination.* International trafficking involves much of the worst poaching excesses. The International Community is ideally positioned to act against international trafficking in poached animals and animal parts. This requires greater agreement on the law, changes in domestic law, intelligence sharing between national game wardens and police forces, and extradition agreement to facilitate prosecution.

*Global education,* encouraging people not to buy products from endangered animals, possibly targeted at countries with reputation for buying trafficked animals and parts.

*Request specific countries to take action,* especially countries with threatened animal populations (mostly in Africa and Latin America) and consumer countries (such as China and Yemen). Because they would have to change their domestic law and practices, the UN has no legal authority, but it can request them to take action and provide incentives, ranging from moral support (strengthening global normative standards and beliefs) to financial assistance or economic sanctions, if it deems the issue important enough.

*Support endangered animal populations,* by providing financial assistance to manage game preserves, to support residents near-by whose crops are endangered, and sometimes

## Issue Brief for the for the Economic and Social Council Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

their lives, or to insure alternative sources of food and income to neighboring people, reducing their incentive to poach.

*Funding:* All of these responses require funding, the trickiest issue for the UN on this as on many other things. Even a study requires funding. Donor governments have a major role to play. But they will have to take the money from somewhere, usually from other programs, or raise taxes and donations to the United Nations.

### Country positions

Member states of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the 120 country voting bloc that dominates the United Nations, may resist efforts that reduce funding for projects that benefit their people. Traditional donors like the European Union and United States may be unwilling to reduce support for established projects. Funding may be the hardest issue to solve.

*African countries* sometimes take a leading role on poaching, especially those with endangered animal populations. Others are skeptical of diverting resources away from their people, especially the poor, who vote or support animal predation.

*China* committed to stopping the manufacture and sale of ivory products for the first time. This is a huge step for a nation that is known for its high demand of ivory. Conservationists believe that this decision from China can mean the end of illegal

elephant poaching. However, China said it cannot handle the issue all by itself and is asking for more serious action from other countries. China is already working together with the United States as part of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue. Together they want to fight illegal wildlife trade, with special attention for import and trade in elephant ivory.

*The European Union* promised to come with a solution for the high killing rates of elephants and rhinos this year. The European Union also banned the import of hunting trophies from Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique in order to reduce trophy hunting.

*Russia* is taking measurement to stop illegal poaching in their country. Russia wants to protect their Siberian tigers, which are killed for their fur.

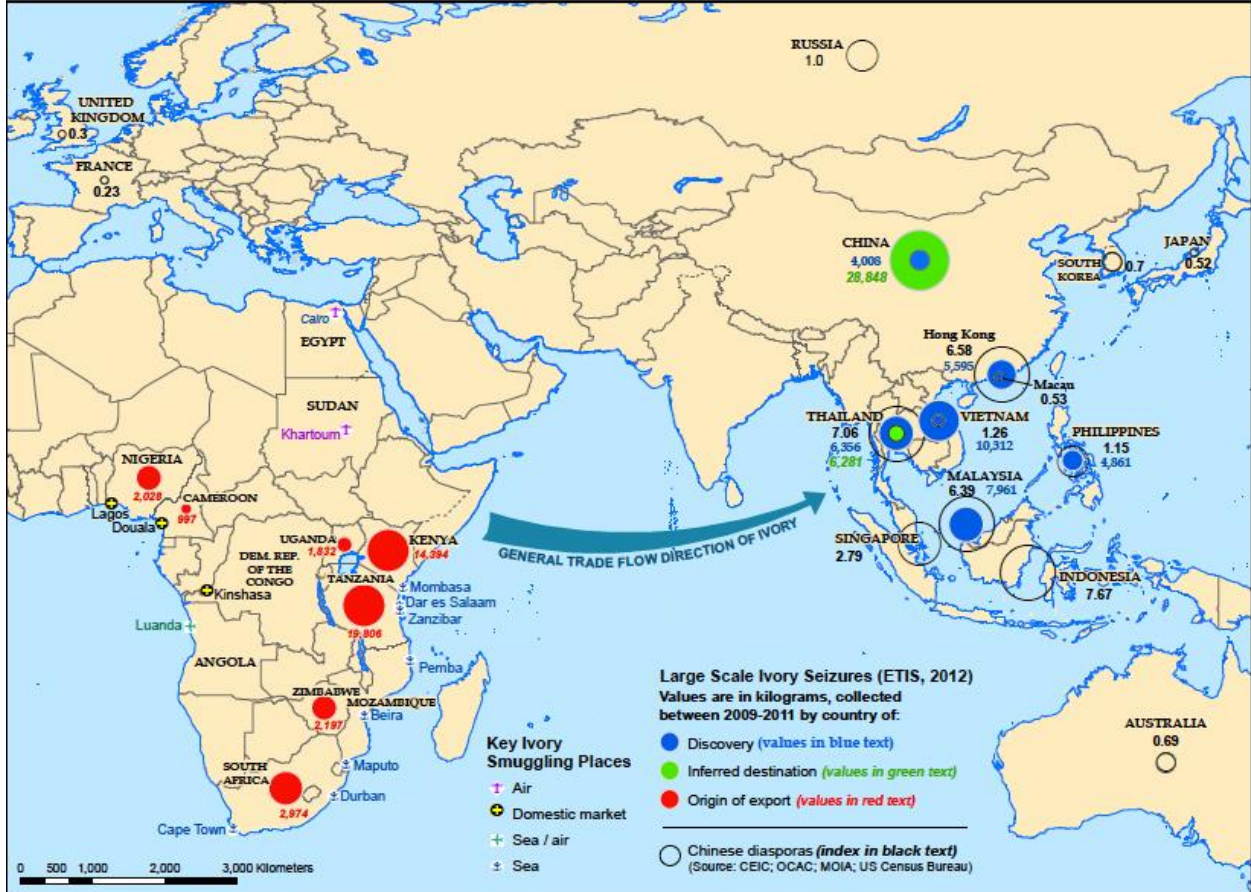
Here we have some of the most influential world powers working on ending wildlife crime. The question is, if this is enough. The UN is encouraging countries all over the world to fight wildlife crime. But how effective is this? Especially when countries such as South Africa still make millions out of hunting wildlife, there is doubt, unless major new funding can be found to offset local losses.

Activists hope the UN will act aggressively to reduce both the supply and demand side of the story. For now, countries are making a good start in fighting wildlife crime, but in order to stop it completely there has to be done more.



**Issue Brief for the for the Economic and Social Council  
Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice**

**Key Ivory Market Centers per Large Scale Seizure Data and Chinese Diasporas**



**Issue Brief for the for the Economic and Social Council  
Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice**

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