



Press Release

ASIA, AFRICA AND NORTH AMERICA JOIN HANDS CRACKING DOWN WILDLIFE CRIME SYNDICATES

Police, Customs and wildlife officers from Asia, Africa and the United States announced today that a cross border enforcement operation codenamed “COBRA” was successfully carried out. The month-long effort was described as “An international, intelligence-driven operation aimed at dismantling organized wildlife crime syndicates with significant results and the prospect for more.” The operation was a welcome and innovative initiative from countries, the first international effort of its kind to focus on the sharing of investigation information in real time among countries, and a concerted response by law enforcement agencies of implicated countries and partnering institutions towards curtailing rampant wildlife crime. It facilitated increased cooperation among range, transit and consumer countries where significant seizures on contraband wildlife specimens and arrests of suspects involve were recorded. The use of specialized investigation techniques was promoted, and a number of follow up investigations into the seizures were initiated.

Between 6 January and 5 February 2013, representatives from the Office of China National Interagency CITES Enforcement Coordination Group (NICECG), Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF) , Nepal Police (Representing SA-WEN), South African Police Service, India’s Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Indonesia Police, Vietnam Environmental Police, Royal Thai Police, Association of Southeast Asia Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Regional Intelligence Liaison Office for Customs in the Asia/Pacific region (RILO A/P) worked jointly and coordinated the operation as an International Coordination Team (ICT) based in Bangkok. Real time sharing of information amongst the agencies and across borders characterizes the ITC, regional and national coordinators.

The ICT, chaired by China, constantly maintained contact with operation teams at regional and national levels. The operation yielded hundred of arrests which included seizures of assorted wildlife specimens mainly 42,000kg red sander wood,

6,500kg elephant ivory, 1,550kg shatoosh (around 10,000 Tibetan antelopes must have been killed to collect the wool of these animals), 2,600 live snakes, 324 hornbill beaks, 102 pangolins, 800 kgs pangolin scales, 22 rhino horns and 4 rhino horn carvings, 10 tiger and 7 leopard trophies, 31kg elephant meat as well as claws and teeth of protected felid animals and plant species. Assorted equipment including fire arms and ammunitions were also recovered from poachers during the operation.

“Operation COBRA focused on quality of investigations over quantity of seizures. The team gathered vital intelligence from this operation, which will be very useful in the ongoing joint investigations,” states Wan Ziming from China. Senior Superintendent, Uttam Kumar Karkee, from Nepal Police points out the necessity of joint efforts from the international community to fight effectively against wildlife crime and added “Operation COBRA has proved itself to be an excellent model for fighting transnational crime”. Adan Alio from LATF says that “Our international team decided to focus on tracking and dismantling criminal networks. Until the top criminals are brought down, the poaching and illegal trade will continue.”

Deputy Chief Edward Grace of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement commented, “This operation sends a powerful message to poachers and smugglers across the globe. The world’s endangered wildlife and plant resources are not theirs for the taking. Congratulations to every officer, country and organization contributing to this operation and the related investigations. Only as global partners can we protect the world’s wildlife”.

John E. Scanlon, Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), stated that ‘this is an important operation that has brought together a wide-range of law enforcement authorities from across range, transit and consumer countries. Authorities demonstrated a strong commitment and willingness to use specialized investigative techniques, which are essential to combating transnational organized wildlife crime. The Operation merits the CITES Secretary-General’s Certificate of Commendation’.

The Lusaka Agreement Secretariat has acknowledged the efforts by Asian and African participating countries and their regional institutions that will go along side enhancing good understanding of the need for both continents to work together in addressing common wildlife conservation challenges.

The operation was proposed by Office of NICECG and ASEAN-WEN in 2012, organized by China, USA, South Africa, ASEAN-WEN, SAWEN and LATF, assisted by the World Customs Organization (WCO), the CITES Secretariat, and International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), targeted species under serious threats such as big cats, elephants, rhinos, pangolins and great apes, and participated by Botswana, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Congo (Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Laos, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Singapore, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, USA, Vietnam and Zambia. FREELAND Foundation provided Operation COBRA with information on wildlife crime that was collected over several years.

Operation COBRA was financially supported by the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s

African Elephant Conservation Fund, Royal Thai Police, China Wildlife Conservation Association and the FREELAND Foundation with in-kind contributions by participating countries.

For more information, please contact:

Mr. Wan Ziming
Director
Law Enforcement and Training Division
CITES Management Authority of China
State Forestry Administration
18 Hepinglidongjie, Beijing 100714, China
Tel: (8610) 84239004
Fax: (8610)84238894
E-Mail: ziming_wan@163.com