



# TGT MUN

**FORUM:** United Nations Economic and Social Council

**ISSUE:** Combating, preventing, and regulating illicit trafficking of animals in the black market.

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**POSITION:** Vice Chairperson of ECOSOC

## Introduction



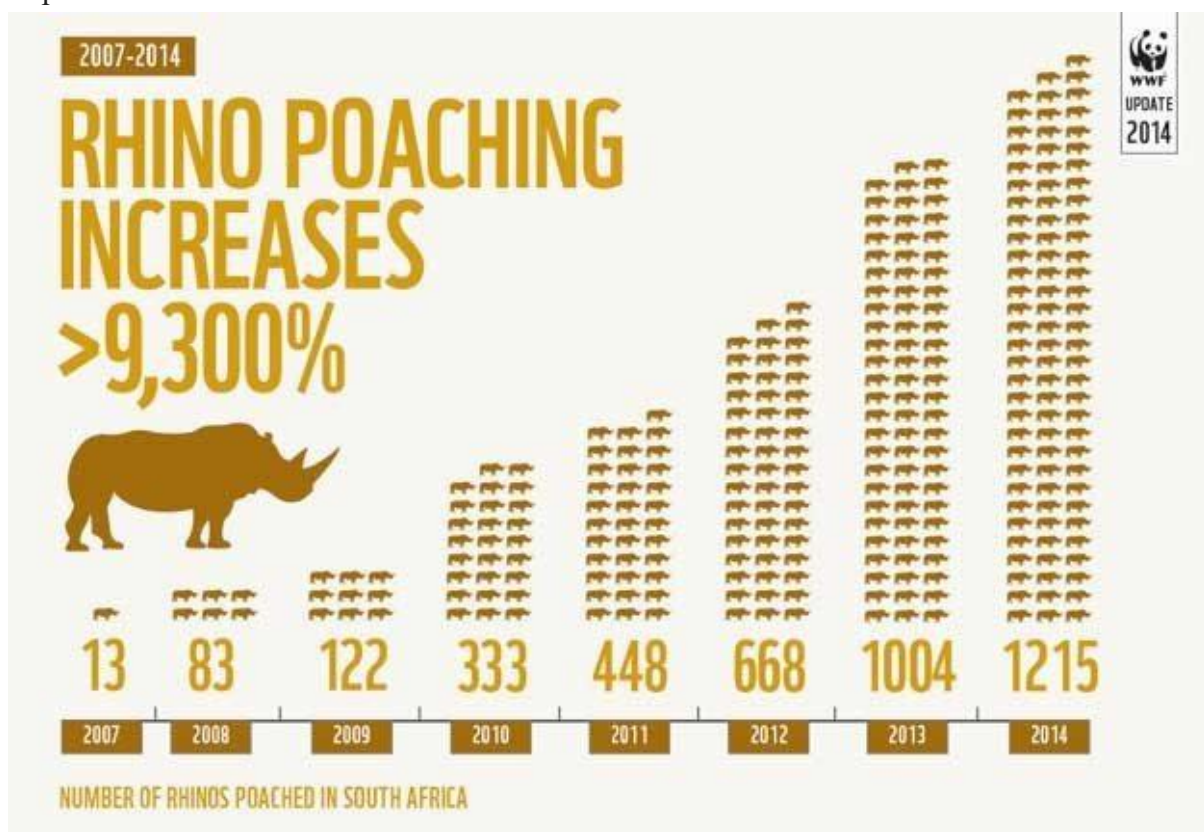
*Elephant tusks and other contraband seized at an airport in China by customs officials.*

*(Source: CGTN)*

Illicit trafficking of animals is the illegal gathering, transportation, and distribution of animals and their derivatives. The derivative products include exotic pets, food, traditional medicine, clothing and jewelry.

The issue of illegal trafficking and smuggling of animals, especially those considered as ‘exotic’ is a relatively recent issue, yet its significance is indelible. Considered to be the fourth largest global illegal trade after narcotics, counterfeit material and human trafficking, it is an industry worth more than USD 19 billion every year.[\[1\]](#)

This revenue may come from sale of endangered species as exotic pets, illegal poaching of endangered animals for various products obtained from them, sold for ornamental value or traditional medicine. For example, African Elephants (*Loxodonta*) have faced the danger of being poached for their tusks, from which ivory is produced, which has high ornamental value, although declared illegal now. Similarly, a previous trend caused heavy poaching of rhinoceros for their horns and tigers for their bones in China, although it was declared legal in 2018. Many species of animals and birds around the world today face the danger of being illegally trafficked, and either killed or held in captivity. Therefore, the issue is of paramount importance.



*A graph showing the increase in poaching of Rhinoceros  
(Source: WWF)*

Furthermore, illegal trafficking of animals has become a major source of funding for many terrorist outfits and illegal organizations. Not only does this industry have criminal organizations within itself which often function on an international level, hence forming a chain between the source and the consumers, terrorist organizations like the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, South Sudan and Congo, and the Arab Janjaweed of Sudan often

use trafficking of animals and other exotic animals in that region to fund their activities and create further unrest in their region.[2] Given how the price of rhinoceros horn has been estimated to be around USD 60 thousand per kilogram in the market (over twice that of gold and platinum), this trade has been thoroughly exploited by terrorist organizations to fund themselves.

A very important reason why this issue needs to be discussed is the fact that animal trafficking has yet not reached the amount of attention it needs, and as compared to illegal trades like firearms and drugs, both the people and governments do not pay adequate attention to the threats posed by illegal trafficking of animals. An example of this is how South Africa, a country marred by elephant poaching, has a punishment of around USD 14 thousand if someone is caught poaching animals, while the minimum punishment one gets for smuggling drugs is no less than five years. Furthermore, as pointed out by the World Wildlife Fund, a major reason behind the growth in this illegal industry is the lack of coordination between producing and consuming countries. While there isn't enough infrastructure of rangers in many countries to prevent poaching, causing a supply of the illegal material, the nations with known patterns of consumption are often doing little to prevent this influx into their territories. [3]



*Map showing major trade routes of wildlife smuggling in context to Europe, a big market  
(Source: DW)*

Given the importance of international cooperation in context of fighting animal smuggling, it is necessary to have the necessary laws and plans of action to deal with this problem.

Conventions like Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) are extremely important in this context and need to be discussed extensively.

## Key Terms

### *Bushmeat*

It is the meat of wild animals used as food. Particularly in Africa, it is the main source of food for underprivileged households. Their high demand has caused an abnormally high amount of hunting, and hence they contribute to the illegal animals' trade.

### *'Exotic' species*

They are species of animals considered rare/endangered. They often carry unique visual or physical traits, hence making them easy to sell on the black market. They take up a major portion of the illegal wildlife trade, and are sold as pets, or as sources of materials such as skin, fur, bones, etc. which may be used for ornamental or medicinal purposes.



*The pangolin, one of the most trafficked exotic animals.*

*(Source: WWF)*

### *Harmonized System*

Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System is an internationally standardized system of names and numbers to classify traded products. Due to lack of differentiation and identification of frequently smuggled animal products, it is extremely difficult for Customs officers around the globe to detect such contraband.

[\[4\]](#)

## Problems Raised

### *Damage to wildlife and ecosystems*

The illegal trafficking trade has caused the deaths of countless animals around the world. According to the World Wildlife Fund, illegal trafficking is the second largest threat to species (after habitat destruction). [\[5\]](#) This activity has put multiple species in threat of extinction, the most prominent example of which might be certain species of elephants and tigers.



### *Economic loss to countries*

The illegal animals trade has caused tremendous loss of revenue for government by means of taxes and duties. The trade is worth more than USD 19 billion dollars, all of which is direct loss to governments.

### *Terror funding*

Illegal smuggling and sale of rare and endangered species has been proven to be a major source of funding by many terrorist organizations, due to lack of risk involved and high payoffs. In many African nations like Chad, the problem has emerged as a major one.

### *Spread of diseases*

It is often speculated that the spread of many deadly diseases like the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Ebola, Avian Flu (H5N1) have been spread between countries due to illegal cross-border trade of animals.

## **Related Countries**

### *Ecuador*

The Latin American state of Ecuador, given its astounding diversity, is home to many exotic species. Therefore, it has grown to be a large market for illegal poaching and smuggling of animals. A species known as the Andean cocks-of-the-rock (*Rupicola Peruvianus*) were recently the victims of massive poaching, causing their deaths in large numbers.



*Andean cocks-of-the-rock, a highly trafficked species.*

(Source: HBW)

animals are known to have been smuggled by concealing them in PVC pipes or under clothes, making them extremely hard to be detected by Customs officials. Parrots and macaws are the most popularly smuggled species in birds, while boas and *charapas* turtles are common reptiles. According to the Living Planet Report (2014) of the World Wildlife Fund, Latin America's wildlife population has fallen by over 83% since the 1970s. Smuggling and trafficking is a major reason for this development. [\[6\]](#)

Birds like parakeets and other small

Although the measures by the Ecuadorian government are often cited as insufficient, the

Integrated Organic Criminal Code of Ecuador allows for the punishment of people involved in all stages of illegal wildlife trafficking. Convicts can face one to three years of prison time, along with a fine of up to USD four thousand. The government is also pursuing national campaigns to raise public awareness. [\[7\]](#)

### *People's Republic of China*

The allegations against China's illegal animal trade market reached an all-time high a few months ago when it was alleged that the deadly COVID-19 pandemic originated in the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan, Hubei Province. Similarly, the 2003 SARS pandemic was also believed to have originated from China as well, although through the consumption of civet cats, which are a local delicacy. According to the South China Morning Post (February 26, 2020), the Chinese animal trafficking industry is worth more than USD 74 billion by itself and employs over 14 million people directly or indirectly. Over 390 major cases of trafficking have been caught by authorities in the past 10 years.



*The Huanan Seafood Market, the alleged location where the spread of COVID-19 began.*

Perhaps the most widely trafficked animal in China is the pangolin. They are believed to contribute to over 20% of global illegal wildlife trade. All eight species of the pangolin are listed on the IUCN Red List of endangered species. [\[8\]](#)

Along with pangolin, tigers and bears are often illegally smuggled, mainly for products obtained from them. Pangolin scales, bear bile, tiger bones and skin, tiger wine, bear paws and many other such products are used as components of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TGM), which in itself is unregulated. China is often considered to be the largest market for smuggled animal goods. [\[9\]](#)

Although changes to relevant laws in 2018 allowed for controlled hunting of tigers in China, after the coronavirus outbreak, the Chinese Communist Party has proposed more stringent action. In an ambitious three-fold plan, the government has introduced a slew of measures to discourage both consumption and illegal poaching of wild animals. The Wildlife Protection and Animal Epidemic Prevention Law is listed to be voted upon soon by the legislature. However, it remains to be noted how the government implements these plans effectively. [\[10\]](#)

### *United States of America*

Being the largest player in the global economy, it comes to no surprise that even the United States of America is one of the largest markets of illegal animal trade. It is claimed that the USA is one of the largest consumers of trafficked animal goods, and serves as a transit point for major

illegal trade routes. Close to fifty thousand illegal wildlife shipments were caught in the USA between 2004 and 2013. Tropical fish, freshwater turtles, corals and pythons are among the most commonly trafficked live species.

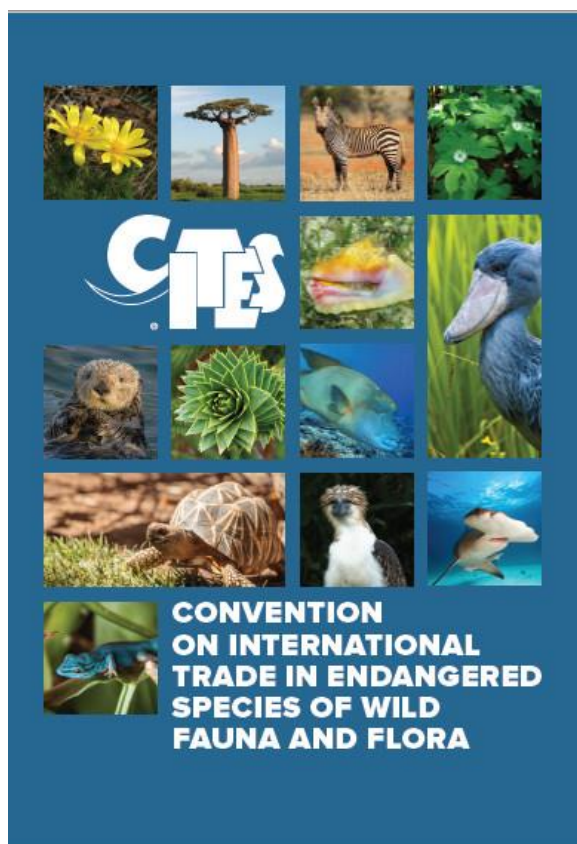
In spite of the newly constructed wall between USA and Mexico, the route is still a hot one for smuggling of animals, as a major source of animal trafficking in the USA is from Latin America through the Mexico-USA border. Since Latin America in itself is a major source of exotic species (See *Ecuador*), the trafficked contraband is smuggled to the USA, which serves as an outlet for trafficked products into other countries, as well as being a heavy consumer market itself.

The government of the USA had introduced the landmark Endangered Species Act in 1973, which paved the way for more global laws pertaining to the same issue. Apart from that, the government's Environment and Natural Resources Division is working in the same direction, according to the Department of Justice. [11]

## Related Organizations

### *IUCN*

The International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is an international scientific organization which enjoys an observer and consultative status in the United Nations. Based out of Switzerland, it focuses on implementation of various international conventions on biodiversity protection and nature conservation.



*Poster about the CITES*  
(Source: CITES)

publishes a list known as the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, in which it classifies species on the basis of the risk they are at. [12]

Apart from sponsoring and facilitating research and papers in context of illegal wildlife trafficking, including its effect on sections of society, the economy, and the species themselves, the organization works to create awareness about the threats caused due to the activity.

Perhaps one of the most notable achievements of the organization was a resolution it adopted in 1963, which ultimately led to the signing of the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which today functions as a cornerstone in fighting against organized and international trafficking of animals. The multilateral treaty has classified more than 5000 species of animals as endangered and prevented them from being part of international trade.

In context of conservation of wildlife, it

## *ICCWC*

The International Consortium of on Combating Wildlife Trade (ICCWC) is a collaborative organization comprising five of the most relevant organizations pertaining to illegal wildlife trafficking: The Secretariat of the CITES (see IUCN), the International Police (INTERPOL), The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization.

Formed in November 2010, the organization focuses on ensuring international cooperation and a coordinated approach against illegal wildlife trafficking, while offering support to national wildlife law enforcement agencies. The organization focuses on strengthening the legal framework within nations and on an international level to effectively curb illegal wildlife trafficking, while keeping in mind the interests and well-being of marginalized and impoverished communities. [13]

## *WWF*



*The iconic logo of the WWF.  
(Source: WWF)*

(WWF) is a non-governmental organization, which is often considered to be the world's largest conservation organization. Founded in 1961, the foundation works to raise funds and awareness against animal trafficking and cruelty against animals in general.

The most notable achievement of WWF in context of illegal wildlife trade is the formation of TRAFFIC (in association with IUCN), which serves as an important wildlife trade monitoring network. Furthermore, the WWF works heavily to raise public awareness against consumption of illegally trafficked animal products.

The World Wildlife Fund for Nature

## **Previous Attempts**

### *CITES*

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is a multilateral agreement which came into force in July 1975. It was the first treaty of its kind to aim to regulate the trade and trafficking of endangered species of animals and prevent their exploitation. Although participation to the agreement is voluntary, the rules laid down by the agreement are binding upon member-states.

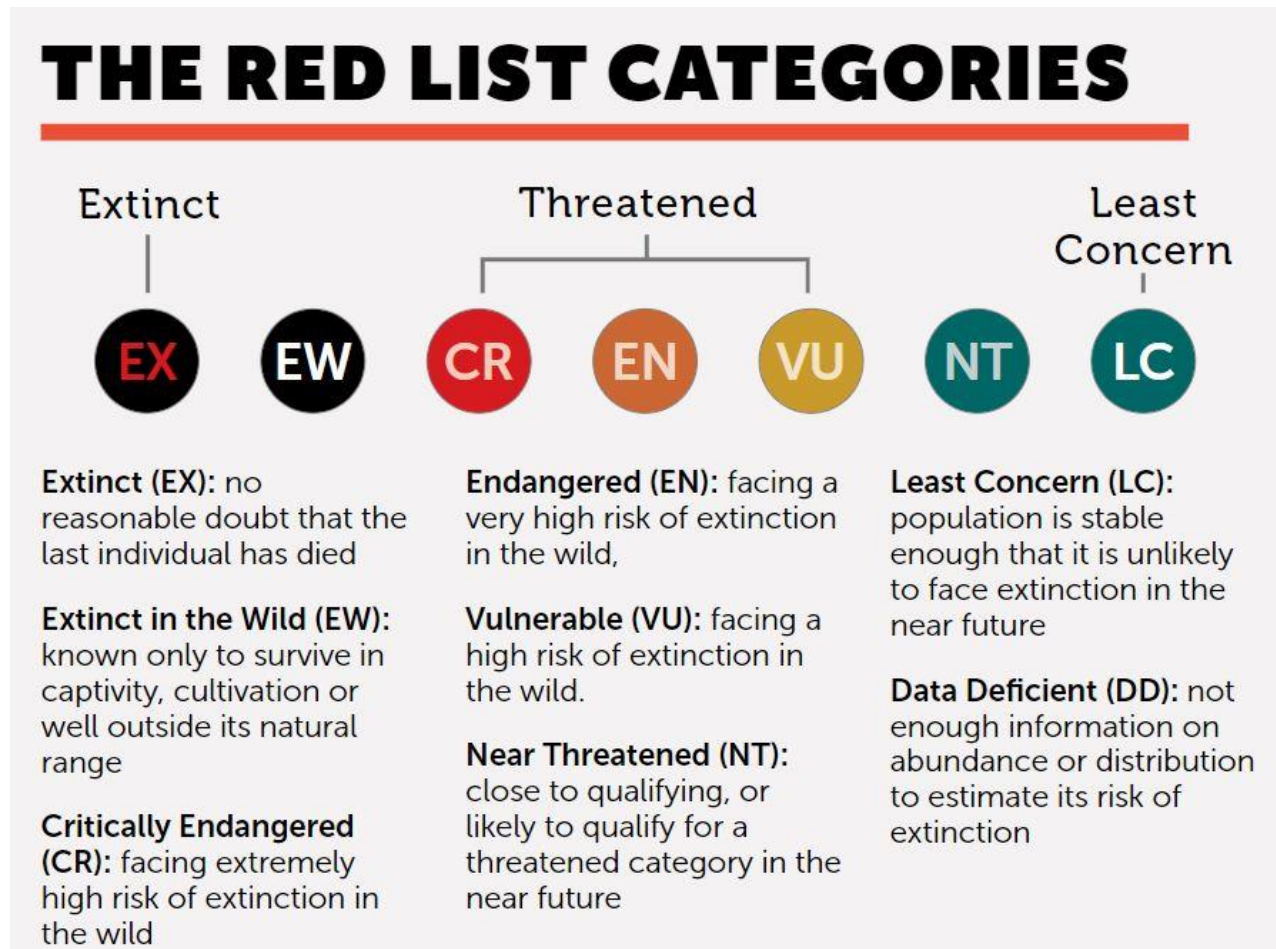
The Convention has 182 states as parties to it, along with the European Union as a whole. A major component of its working is the preparations of Annexures and lists to classify species of animals depending upon the danger they face of extinction, and then ensuring that member-nations set up adequate bodies to ensure enforcement of these lists in international trade.

Although many have criticized the convention for being inefficient in its classification and



due to the lack of enforcement it possesses, it remains to be an important landmark in international cooperation against wildlife trade.

### *IUCN Red List*



*A chart showing the various risk categories in the IUCN Red List  
(Source: BirdLife)*

Founded in 1964 under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Red List of Threatened Species too was a pioneering initiative to control illegal trade of animals. The periodically updated list assesses the risk faced by various species based on different factors. It also publishes regional lists.

Based on scientific research, the list is an important method to monitor the effect of illegal trade. Since its inception, it has grown to be a defining document in the fight against illegal wildlife trafficking.

### *TRAFFIC*

The Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network, known as TRAFFIC, was founded in 1979 as a body to effectively monitor the trade of wildlife between nations. Formed as a result of a strategic alliance between the WWF and the IUCN, it aims to monitor the trade of animals, hence minimizing the illegality of it.

It works mainly on the basis of providing funding to adequate research and create awareness to prevent trafficking. It has emerged to be an important tool.

## Possible Solutions

### *Strengthening Intelligence Based Enforcement Approaches*

Instead of disrupting wildlife trafficking at established choke points, which can change rapidly along with trade routes the law enforcement agencies should focus on gathering and managing information on the activities of wildlife trafficking networks and the criminals that run them, creating and sharing intelligence products with government enforcement agencies, and improving communications at the national and international scale to implement proactive enforcement activities. This approach increasingly focuses on long-term support and mentoring, building on short-term capacity building and training workshops. By this the enforcement agencies could convert actionable intelligence into real action. This approach has already led to enhanced enforcement operations resulting in the successful arrest, prosecution, and conviction of targeted wildlife criminals in several countries, including Indonesia and the Republic of the Congo.

### *Improving the legal framework*

The governments must strengthen wildlife crime laws and improve their enforcement, as well as to make it more difficult for consumers to purchase illegally or unsustainably sourced wildlife products. Criminal justice systems and relevant government agencies must have robust laws and penalties for combatting wildlife crime (including wildlife trafficking) and that they follow through on legal procedures, including prosecution, conviction and sentencing of criminals convicted of wildlife crimes. At the international level, intergovernmental treaties such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) must be effectively integrated in member country's legal framework to combat wildlife trafficking.

### *Increasing the funding to tackle and prosecute illegal poachers*

The funding needs to be increased for tackling the poachers. Technical and financial assistance to the concerned authorities to strengthen the criminal justice response to wildlife crimes, including the recovery of traded items, especially in developing and underdeveloped countries. The forest rangers in Africa have been provided with all the vests and facilities to ensure that poachers do not succeed in killing animals. We have seen similar upgradation being discussed in India, with reference to forest rangers. We have already seen the positive of non-profit organizations like WWF, working on wildlife conservation. The government should also look promote and encourage such organizations dedicated to ensuring wildlife safety.

### *Empowering the people*

In the past, campaigns like save the Tigers have been fruitful in reducing the tiger poaching. Social campaigns like these which involve common people can be a step towards saving the endangered life forms. In several countries' poachers have been now working with the forest authorities to prevent further poaching. The authorities have now started collaborating with the local communities in raising awareness to ensure that poachers stay away. This approach could further be strengthened by providing incentives to the people and poachers for their collaboration with government agencies.

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