

CONCEPT PAPER

COMBATING WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING IN ASIA

This paper outlines a proposal by the United States and [ASEAN co-chair] for an ARF workshop on wildlife trafficking.

Background

At the April 2013 ASEAN Regional Forum Intersessional Meeting on Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (ARF ISM on CTTC) held in Hanoi, Vietnam, ministries throughout the region expressed concern about the escalation of trafficking in endangered and protected wildlife worldwide. Conservative estimates place the global illegal wildlife trade to be worth approximately \$8-10 billion annually, and it is increasingly linked with other illicit activities that undermine security, stability, and economic prosperity. While wildlife trafficking is not a new phenomenon, there has been a significant increase in the number of incidents and sophistication of trafficking operations in recent years, particularly in the ASEAN region. As wildlife traffickers have become increasingly well-armed and well-organized; what was once small scale or opportunistic killing has escalated, making more common the coordinated slaughter of endangered and protected wildlife commissioned by terrorist organizations and organized criminal syndicates. In 2013, ASEAN Ministers agreed to include wildlife trafficking as a 9th pillar of engagement for the region.

Wildlife trafficking impacts:

- Increasingly, wildlife trafficking is intertwined with other illicit activities that undermine security and rule of law. Organized criminal networks are attracted to wildlife trafficking for its profitability, low risk of detection and prosecution, and light fines and jail sentences. Criminal organizations diversify their illicit trade in arms, drugs, or other contraband with wildlife products; and there are reports of armed rebel groups involved in wildlife trafficking. Organized crime, terrorism, and drug trafficking are strengthened by profits from illegal wildlife trade.
- Southeast Asia is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world, supporting one sixth of the world's species of mammals and amphibians, a fifth of the world's species of butterflies, and almost one fourth of the world's species of birds. Much of the region's flora and fauna are not found anywhere else in the world, but that rich biodiversity is threatened by wildlife trafficking. Species have gone locally extinct in Southeast Asia due to wildlife trade. If trends continue, some scientists predict that 13-42% of Southeast Asia's animal and plant species could be lost in this century—half of those losses would represent global extinctions. Removing species unbalances these delicate and complicated ecosystems and frequently results in further loss of biodiversity and environmental degradation.
- Approximately 65,000 kilograms of ivory is trafficked annually from central and southern Africa chiefly driven by a vast increase in demand from the growing middle class of Southeast and East Asia. Many other species, such as rhinos, tigers, pangolins, are severely threatened by expanding demand in ARF countries.

- Wildlife trafficking can also pose a public health risk. Up to 75 percent of human diseases – such as SARS, avian influenza, and Ebola virus – are caused by infectious agents that can be transmitted between (or are shared by) animals and humans. The illegal trade of live animals or their parts bypasses public health controls and can put human populations at risk for disease.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that overall, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing can account for up to 30 percent of total catches in some important fisheries, and that catches of particular species could be up to three times the permitted amount—threatening endangered and vulnerable species. The lack of regulation in fishing also makes seafarers vulnerable to labor exploitation, including human trafficking.

Not only is the conservation of our planet's wildlife a shared global responsibility, but illicit trade of rhino horns, tortoise shells, elephant ivory, and bear bile, robs local communities of economic resources, threatens biodiversity, and reduces ecosystem resilience. Booming economies and growing disposable incomes have caused increasing consumer demand in Asia and elsewhere for illegally traded wildlife products, including marine resources, fueling high prices for these products and contributing to the escalation of poaching and wildlife trafficking.

ASEAN has taken a number of steps to combat wildlife trafficking. Since the establishment of the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) in 2005, arrests and seizures of illegal wildlife have increased ten-fold, and 2,000 officials have been trained in anti-poaching operations. These operations need to be expanded to cover the large scale of this global problem. In the UNODC 2013 Threat Assessment for Transnational Organized Crime, the illicit wildlife trade (not including timber trafficking) is estimated to be \$2.5 billion each year in the region alone.

To address the issue of wildlife trafficking in Asia and the Pacific, the United States and [ASEAN nation] propose a workshop on mitigating demand for illegal trafficking of wildlife. This effort will complement wildlife trafficking-related activities planned in APEC and other fora, as well as the work of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC).

Workshop Format

The workshop sessions will feature expert speakers, case studies, country experiences, lessons learned, sharing of public awareness campaigns, and participant dialogue which could focus on one or more of the following themes:

- Enhancing regional and sub-regional cooperation
- Highlighting proven national laws on wildlife crime and asset seizure that act as an effective deterrent to organized crime
- Strengthening international commitments

- Reducing demand
- Sharing best practices for coordinated and cross-boundary enforcement of laws pertaining to wildlife trafficking
- Enhancing sustainable management and conservation of wildlife populations

ARF participants will contribute to the workshop by sharing their experiences and providing examples of challenges and lessons learned. Invited expert speakers will provide educational presentations and case studies on specific areas of interest.

The workshop will provide participants with an interactive opportunity to discuss relevant and related issues as well as possible courses of action.

Participation

Participants in the workshop could include director-level officials and subject matter experts from policy, communications, criminal justice, and law in ARF, and others as appropriate. It may also be appropriate to invite specialists from relevant international or non-governmental organizations as speakers and participants.

Output

A proposed output of this workshop is the identification and development of examples and “best practices” for ministerial approval as well as developing preventive diplomacy mechanisms to address this regional security challenge.

Outcome

A proposed outcome of this workshop is strengthened regional knowledge and capacity to address the security and criminal implications of wildlife trafficking.

The outcome, best practices, and recommended preventive diplomacy and legal mechanisms developed in the workshop would be reported to the 2015 ARF ministerial meeting for adoption.

Location and Dates

It is proposed that the workshop be held over two or three days sometime in the 2014/2015 ARF cycle. The workshop would be conducted in English. The location is to be determined.

Administrative Arrangements

International travel, accommodations, and other related costs necessary for participation will be borne by the participants.

Co-chairing

The United States is seeking an ASEAN co-chair for this activity and will be approaching possible partners to determine their interest but would welcome expressions of interest.

Comments

Please direct comments or questions on this proposal to:

Tharon Sperry (SperryT@state.gov)

Political-Military Advisor, Office of Multilateral Affairs, U.S. Department of State.