

CLIMATE CHANGE,
ENVIRONMENTAL
SECURITY AND
NATURAL DISASTERS
page 3

ENERGY SECURITY
page 3

FOOD SECURITY
page 4

HEALTH SECURITY
page 5

PEACE, HUMAN
SECURITY AND
DEVELOPMENT
page 5

TRANSNATIONAL
CRIME
page 6

HUMANITARIAN
ASSISTANCE AND
DISASTER RELIEF
page 7

WATER SECURITY
page 8

Illegal Wildlife Trafficking in Southeast Asia



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Illegal wildlife trafficking is currently the fourth most lucrative transnational crime. Falling behind drugs, humans and arms trafficking, the illegal wildlife trafficking industry is valued at up to USD\$23 billion a year. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime has described illegal wildlife trafficking as a transnational organised environmental crime which drives species to extinction. In addition to threatening the survival of identified fauna and flora, illegal wildlife trafficking impacts the biodiversity by disturbing the balance in the ecological and environmental system, thereby impacting peoples' well being. Illegal wildlife trafficking is therefore a serious concern of trans-boundary nature at many different levels.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

On 1 July 1975, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) entered into force. CITES is an international agreement which materialised as a result of a resolution at a meeting of members of The World Conservation Union in 1963. The Convention was drafted with the objective

of ensuring that the survival of specimens of wild fauna and flora are not threatened by international trade, and to regulate the international cooperation to safeguard identified species from over-exploitation. More than 30,000 species of fauna and flora ranging from live specimens to derived products are currently protected under the Convention. Till date, 183 countries have signed and are bound by the Convention. In the Southeast Asian region, all ten Association of the South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries are parties to the agreement.

ASEAN and Illegal Wildlife Trafficking

In 2005, ASEAN developed a Regional Action Plan on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora for 2005-2010. As part of the plan, the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) was launched. ASEAN-WEN is a regional intergovernmental law-enforcement network set up to facilitate the exchange of best practices and knowledge sharing in combating illegal international trade in endangered flora and fauna in the region. During this period, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supported the ASEAN-WEN through the Asia's Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking

(ARREST) Program by amalgamating the anti illegal wildlife trafficking efforts of AMS, China, South Asia, and civil society organisations. In addition, non-state actors such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) also collaborate together through TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade monitoring network which works globally on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development for wild fauna and flora trade.

Despite these efforts, there has been an increase in the buying power of the rich in countries within the Southeast Asian region. This is coupled with a rising demand for rare live species and derived products such as seahorses, timber, pangolins, asian elephants, tigers, rhinos, and ivory for purposes such as medication, food and pets. These have caused the region to still be of interest to the CITES Secretariat in terms of its efforts to tackle illegal wildlife trafficking.

Of the mentioned trafficked fauna and flora in the region, one of the items of extra concern is raw ivory,

which can cost more than USD\$2,600 per kilogram in the black market. Raw ivory can be used as medication in traditional Chinese medicine, and it can also be used to create ivory souvenirs, which are popular purchases for tourists in countries such as Thailand and Myanmar. The CITES Secretariat had encouraged some countries of primary concerns to implement a National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP) to combat illegal ivory trade, and the efforts had led to positive outcomes in their first stage, including a fall in the number of ivory products available in the market.

Moving Forward

The commitment to combat illegal wildlife trade in the region can only be achieved by ensuring continued efforts and perseverance through the region's knowledge sharing, cross-border coordination, regulations and enforcement. However, in light of the growth of technology and online marketplaces, it is important for the regulatory and enforcement efforts to expand their reach to capture traders who might have moved their services online

in the attempt to circumvent domestic regulations.



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Suggested Readings:

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CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND NATURAL DISASTERS

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Rising tensions and temperatures in the South China Sea

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Xianyao Chen, et al.,
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Climate Week NYC

18–24 September 2017
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Mobilizing Local and Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Change Observations and Solutions: A Perspective from the Caribbean Region

27–29 September 2017
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ENERGY SECURITY

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Seema Sengupta,
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ICEPNE 2017 : 19th International Conference on Energy Policy and Nuclear Energy

10-11 August 2017
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Singapore International Energy Week 2017

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15-17 October 2017
Berlin, Germany

14th International Conference on Urban Health
26-29 September 2017
Coimbra, Portugal

PEACE, HUMAN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

"Pistol plan" shows why peace celebrations in Colombia premature

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Courtesy of Flickr account of U.S. Pacific Fleet and used under a creative commons license.

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Unlike ASEAN, G7 leaders send strong statement on South China Sea

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**Southwest Conference
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11-13 Jan 2018
Ontario, Canada

**2018 Applied
Research in Crime
and Justice
Conference**

15-16 Feb 2018
Brisbane, Australia

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF



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28-29 August 2017
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Mekong River Commission
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27 August – 1 September 2017,
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18-21 September 2017
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