



International Civil Aviation Organization

WORKING PAPER

A40-WP/199¹
EX/79
2/8/19
(Information paper)

ASSEMBLY — 40TH SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 21: United Nations 2030 Agenda - Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs)

**PREVENTION OF ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING VIA
COMMERCIAL AVIATION**

(Presented by the International Air Transport Association)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This information paper calls attention to the increasing challenge of transnational criminal groups exploiting commercial aviation to traffic wildlife illegally and the subsequent industry response to this challenge.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This information paper relates to the Strategic Objective Environmental Protection.
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Not applicable
<i>References:</i>	

¹ Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish versions provided by IATA.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Transnational criminal groups are increasingly exploiting the interconnected air transport system to pursue the illegal traffic of wildlife. While States have the primary responsibility for identifying, apprehending and prosecuting traffickers, it is recognized that aviation staff can play an important role in preventing wildlife trafficking. In addition, airline data supplied to enforcement authorities is increasingly becoming an important source of digital intelligence.

1.2 The illegal trade of wildlife is perceived by criminals to be a high profit and low risk activity, which is not only driving many endangered species towards extinction but also strengthening criminal networks, posing increasing risks to global health and undermining national and international security². It also threatens nature-based tourism and the communities which depend on it.

1.3 Recent reports^{3,4} have highlighted the widespread nature and scale of the exploitation of the air transport network. Wildlife trafficking incidents have been reported at airports in over 130 States since 2009 with one State reporting an average of 7 seizures per day⁵. Although initially perceived as an air cargo problem, data indicates a shift with at least 54 per cent of seizures being related to passengers (both on their person and in their baggage)⁶.

1.4 In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly agreed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which include SDG 15 relating to biodiversity. SDG15 sets a target of "taking urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna, and addressing both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products". The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is working with its members to ensure that the airline sector makes a positive contribution to achieving this goal.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The airline industry is committed to helping States combat the illegal wildlife trade. This was highlighted in June 2016 when IATA's 72nd Annual General Meeting adopted a Resolution on the Illegal Trade in Wildlife⁷ which provides a clear and unequivocal statement of the airlines' position.

2.2 IATA has worked with its members to identify and review emerging wildlife conservation issues with industry relevance and to determine appropriate response strategies. IATA has produced guidance material and videos that aim to assist airlines in raising awareness of wildlife trafficking issues with staff and passengers and, thus, reduce safety, health and conservation risks. In addition, IATA has supported many awareness raising events around the world that provide airline,

² United Nations General Assembly. 2017. *Resolution 71/326: Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife*. [Online]. A/RES/71/326. [Accessed 18 July 2019]. Available from: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/326

³ Utermohlen, M. and Baine, P. 2017. *Flying Under the Radar: Wildlife Trafficking through the Air Transport Sector*. [Online]. C4ADS and USAID Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species (ROUTES). [Accessed 18 July 2019]. Available from: http://routespartnership.org/industry-resources/publications/flying-under-the-radar_final.pdf/view

⁴ Utermohlen, M. and Baine, P. 2018. *In Plane Sight: Wildling Trafficking in the Air Transport Sector*. [Online]. C4ADS and USAID Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species (ROUTES). [Accessed 18 July 2019]. Available from: <http://routespartnership.org/industry-resources/publications/in-plane-sight/view>

⁵ See footnote 3.

⁶ See footnote 3.

⁷ IATA. 2016. 72nd *IATA Annual General Meeting Resolution on the Illegal Trade in Wildlife*. [Online]. [Accessed 18 July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.iata.org/pressroom/pr/Documents/resolution-agm-2016-wildlife.pdf>

airport and enforcement staff with the skills and knowledge needed to identify and report illegal trafficking in wildlife.

2.3 Furthermore, over 70 aviation stakeholders, including IATA, the Airport Council International (ACI), regional airline associations, airports and over 61 airlines, have made an individual commitment by signing the United for Wildlife Transport Taskforce Buckingham Palace Declaration⁸, established by The Royal Foundation of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and The Duke and Duchess of Sussex. The Declaration outlines 11 Commitments based on raising customer and staff awareness; improved staff training and reporting; exchange of information between the public and private sector; and promotion of the Declaration across the global supply chain.

2.4 The US adopted a national strategy against wildlife trafficking following an Executive Order⁹ issued in July 2013. As part of this strategy, IATA has joined with a consortium of international conservation organizations, as a Core Member of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species (ROUTES) Partnership. This five-year partnership aims to support the transport sector by providing information on high-risk species, routes and concealment methods, awareness raising activities with staff, passengers and cargo customers and facilitating the reporting of suspected traffickers and suspicious cargo.

2.5 Seizure information is collected internationally by national customs and border agencies and is being analysed by multiple organizations engaged in both the United for Wildlife Transport Taskforce and the ROUTES Partnership (including the World Customs Organization (WCO), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United for Wildlife and C4ADS). Increasingly, documentation indicates that the illegal wildlife trade represents a threat to national security¹⁰ and may even represent an indirect threat to aviation safety and security measures¹¹.

2.6 Evidence shows that:

2.6.1 Illegal wildlife and their products can have a high-value on the black market with rhino horn worth more than cocaine, gold or diamonds¹², enabling poachers and wildlife traffickers to intimidate and corrupt stakeholders along selected supply chains. They have the ability to compromise and/or infiltrate both public and private sector staff at certain airports, demonstrating that the threat of wildlife trafficking may go beyond corporate responsibility¹³.

2.6.2 Traffickers attempt to bypass border controls, by using a wide variety of obfuscation methods, from taking circuitous routes purchased with separate tickets, last minute bookings and

⁸ United for Wildlife. 2016. *UNITED FOR WILDLIFE TRANSPORT TASKFORCE BUCKINGHAM PALACE DECLARATION*. [Online]. Buckingham Palace, London. [Accessed 18 July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.unitedforwildlife.org/the-buckingham-palace-declaration/>

⁹ Office of the Press Secretary. 2013. *Executive Order – Combating Wildlife Trafficking*. Executive Order. No. 13648, p.78. [Online]. The White House. [Accessed 18 July 2019]. Available from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/01/executive-order-combating-wildlife-trafficking>

¹⁰ See footnote 1.

¹¹ See footnote 3.

¹² Biggs, D. et al. 2013. Legal Trade of Africa's Rhino Horns. *Science*. [Online]. **339** (6123), pp.1038-1039. [Accessed 18 July 2019]. Available from: <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/339/6123/1038>

¹³ See footnote 3 on pp.64.

amendments, concealing products within consumer goods to wearing specifically modified clothing, and may smuggle wildlife on their person, within checked baggage, cargo consignments or mail¹⁴.

2.6.3 Information and intelligence indicate that some States are missing up to 90 per cent of known cases which are instead seized in transit or at the destination¹⁵. Prosecutions of convicted traffickers in transit or at destination entail the cooperation of multiple States and can be complex and lengthy. As a result, States are increasingly focussing their efforts on outbound flights¹⁶, necessitating additional checks on passengers, baggage and cargo shipments. These activities represent a direct challenge to timely clearance procedures but can be mitigated by the application of robust risk management engines, cross border sharing of intelligence and coordinated activities between enforcement authorities.

2.6.4 Concealed wildlife and products are not subject to health and sanitary checks and as a result, are at high risk of spreading infectious diseases¹⁷. Live animals that are not transported in accordance with IATA's Live Animals Regulations¹⁸ (LAR) may represent a safety threat to both the animals themselves and to the handling personnel.

2.7 Information related to the nature, scale and consequences of the illegal traffic of wildlife is rarely exchanged between Contracting States, operators and airports. This reluctance to share information undermines cooperation and inhibits aviation stakeholder engagement on this important criminal activity.

2.8 As the nature and scale of exploitation of the air transport network by wildlife traffickers emerges, it has become apparent that the illegal wildlife trade can undermine safety and security. The aviation sector is rapidly modernizing with automation and digitization and the data generated can prove an important source of digital intelligence that could be used by enforcement to significantly increase detection rates. States should facilitate aviation stakeholder and enforcement engagement to maximize synergies and reduce exploitation.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The Assembly is invited to note the information provided in this Information Paper.

— END —

¹⁴ See footnote 3.

¹⁵ See footnote 3.

¹⁶ World Customs Organization. 2018. *SAFE FRAMEWORK OF STANDARDS*. [Online]. [Accessed 18 July 2019]. Available from: <http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/instruments-and-tools/tools/safe-package/safe-framework-of-standards.pdf?la=en>

¹⁷ See footnote 3 on pp.13.

¹⁸ IATA. 2018. *IATA Live Animals Regulations*. 44th ed. Geneva: IATA.