

Tackling Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife

Forum: General Assembly

Student Officer: Hubert You, Deputy Chair

Introduction

Due to wildlife trafficking, approximately 90% of African Elephants have been decimated within the last century. Meanwhile, an estimated 100 million sharks and 200,000 pangolins are killed and trafficked yearly. The statistics reveal that wildlife populations are consistently declining due to the proliferation of wildlife trafficking: illicit crimes of smuggling, poaching, and trading endangered species. The sophisticated international network established by criminal gangs supplies these illegal activities, seeking lucrative profits from the preciousness of the resources. Since Wildlife trafficking has constantly received substantial global attention via social media, many organizations and local governments strive to alleviate the issue. Yet, the problem is never-ending and still broadly happens around the world. Meanwhile, the decline in wildlife populations will likely bring short-term and long-term effects in local communities resulting from the deprivation of ecological and cultural benefits they generate. Thus, regarding wildlife trafficking, the global community should devise effective preventive measures promptly.

Background

Sharks are apex predators in a marine ecosystem. They are essential among marine biodiversity in maintaining the balance of the food webs for numerous species. Therefore, without sharks, the marine ecosystem cannot operate properly. However, However, regardless of their mighty strength, they are not free from trafficking. The population of sharks has rapidly declined since the 1970s due to overfishing for their fins. Their fins are used in popular Chinese dishes that symbolize prestige. Thus, poachers target shark fins for their high price and utilize brutal methods to capture them: fishermen pull the



Poached shark fins are scattered on the floor

sharks onboard a boat, cut them off alive, and toss them back into the sea. The finless sharks suffer from profuse blood loss and cannot swim. Eventually, they typically end up dying hopelessly.

Three noteworthy problematic aspects of wildlife trafficking are indicated in the paragraph above:

- Wildlife trafficking endangers species being poached, possibly leading to extinctions.

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- Decimating specific wildlife populations can eventually disrupt the entire ecosystem, ultimately negatively influencing humans at the top of the food chain.
- Besides all these issues, another problem is that humans are using inhumane approaches to poaching animals, which is not tolerable and considered earnestly.

Meanwhile, sharks are not the only ones suffering from this brutal fate. A problem like the one listed above occurs in various species, such as rhinos, elephants, pangolins, monkeys, lions, et cetera. Regardless of the strenuous efforts of enacting preventive legislation punishing illicit animal poaching, thousands of endangered animals are still murdered every day in Africa due to the demands of resources in the black market.

Yet it is exceptionally challenging to restrict poaching activities due to several reasons:

1. One of the most typical reasons is the lack of economic activities for the poachers besides poaching activities. The countries home to many victim animals of poaching often struggles with poverty. As a result, poaching activities are great opportunities for the perpetrators to aid themselves financially. For instance, the annual income of people in the Democratic Republic of Congo is about \$785 US dollars. Meanwhile, a single pound of ivory can yield \$1,500 on the black market: about twice more than their annual income. In other words, this means that the family can experience improved life quality if they kill just one single elephant, which is a very tempting option for the poachers.
2. Moreover, bribery due to corruption often happens in areas where wildlife trafficking businesses thrive.
3. Finally, the surveillance of wildlife crimes is not done thoroughly due to weak law enforcement. Likewise, since Africa is a large state, it is tough for a limited amount of patrolling personnel to cover all territories.

These are the reasons why wildlife trafficking remains a problem.



Frozen pangolins seized in Palawan, Philippines

Places of High Concern

Kenya

Kenya is one of those countries that has been suffering for decades from wildlife trafficking issues. It is consistently experiencing considerable poaching of elephants and rhinos due to the demand for ivory and rhino horns. Since 1989, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) establishment, the issue seemed to mitigate. However, Kenya's wildlife trafficking peaked again around 2014 due to the re-emergence of the demands for ivory and rhino horns. Fortunately, the situation was gradually improving thanks to the strenuous efforts in fortifying punishments and consistent patrolling of the KWS officers. Yet, recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a rapid escalation in wildlife trafficking. The primary reason is that the pandemic has caused a drastic decrease in the number of

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tourists. As a result, numerous Kenyan citizens, who maintained their lives with tourism-related jobs, were suddenly simultaneously unemployed. They struggled with hunger, which deeply tempted them to seek wildlife trafficking as an opportunity to gain profit for survival. Consequently, the wildlife trafficking problem is exacerbating day by day.

Golden Triangle: Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos

The Golden Triangle is where the borders of Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos meet. It is also a place where illegal global trade is thriving in dominance. Many vulnerable, endangered animals are being imported and exported daily, yet the loose law enforcement and tracking provoke the flourishing of wildlife trafficking. Police interference is extremely hard in those areas, and frequent bribery of corrupt officials aggravates the crisis.



The Golden Triangle (shaded in red) stretches from northern Thailand to Yunnan Province, China.

China

China is the largest market regarding illicit wildlife trafficking. The constant high demand for wildlife is due to traditional Chinese customs, medicines, cuisines, etc. For instance, bear bile, pangolin meat, and shark fin are considered delicacies among Chinese citizens. The trades happen legally and illegally through multiple routes to confuse government surveillance. Around the end of 2022, the top Chinese legislature passed a revised version of the Wildlife Protection Law, which will be set in motion on 1st May 2023. It integrates significant points, such as facilitating wildlife rescue, managing captive-bred wild animals, preventing zoonosis spillover, and further specifying the private sector's duty in wildlife crime deterrence. It remains to be seen what the outcome will be.

International Actions

EU

EU is persistently making progress in improving the wildlife trafficking situation.

In February 2016, the European Commission devised the Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking. It dealt with three major priorities: ameliorated prevention, fortified law enforcement, and enhanced partnerships between the EU and its Member States. The Action Plan mitigated wildlife trafficking circumstances in the EU and reinforced the EU's role against the global issue.

On 9 November 2022, the EU declared the modified Action Plan regarding wildlife trafficking. The updated version of the Action Plan supplements the original Action plan and will lead further EU measures against wildlife trafficking until 2027. It contains four major priorities. The three priorities are similar to before: prevention, enforcement, and global collaboration. One new priority is strengthening the legal EU framework, expected to bring optimistic results.

UNODC

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Regarding the wildlife trafficking issue, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is showing active movements to alleviate it.

- Firstly, it is putting effort into strengthening legislative and regulatory frameworks through several means, such as working with government partners to offer technical aids to inspect and adjust laws or regulations.
- Secondly, it plans to enhance the knowledge and skills of local police, customs officers, border officials, rangers, wildlife/forestry officials, and prosecutors to investigate and prosecute related criminal activities by providing them with specialized training courses, law enforcement advisory programs, and e-Learning Programme.
- Lastly, it is periodically gathering data analysis regarding wildlife crimes happening worldwide. For example, it researches illicit financial flows of wildlife crimes, assesses legal frameworks in the region, and reports all these working papers to contribute to society.



UNODC World Wildlife Crime Report 2020

African Union Commission

AUC recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding between TRAFFIC. Under the contract, the parties plan to collaborate to handle various environmental matters in Africa. Regarding wildlife trafficking issues, they will unite to exterminate the illegal exploitation and trade of Africa's wildlife, specifically preserving flora and fauna on land, wetlands, and marine ecosystems.

Possible Solutions

In the best scenario, law enforcement personnel can stop poaching. Deterrence can happen by completing effective patrolling with armed equipment to face poachers. Park rangers should keep communicating with local communities so that the monitoring of wildlife trafficking can be done effectively. To address the issue, the local community or the government should prepare a reasonable amount of incentives for the individuals who report wildlife crimes and raise awareness of the case.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the above paragraphs, job loss due to Covid-19 is also a primary motivation that triggers local citizens to become poachers. Thus, the government should provide more job opportunities, such the law enforcement personnel, to stabilize the financial situation of the potential poachers. Also, the government should work on making tourism prosper again in African countries in various ways regardless of the ongoing Covid-19 status. This way, citizens can solve their financial burden, and the number of poachers will decrease correspondingly.

Moreover, enforcement agencies and legislative bodies should focus more on tracking trafficking routes. They must understand how crime perpetrators bypass law interference and conceal themselves from surveillance. Since one of the easiest and most frequent ways of disguising the monitoring is bribing local officials, stricter regulation is required.

To make all the above feasible, the most significant factor is establishing a robust legal framework that monitors not only the criminals but also law enforcement officials so that they work

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efficiently and effectively. The government should enact legislation regarding this issue and provide law enforcement officials with specialized training courses on prosecuting perpetrators.

Glossary

EU: The European Union is a political and economic partnership of 27 European countries: member states.

AUC: AUC, African Union Commission, is African Union's secretariat that represents the African nations.

UNODC: UNODC stands for United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. It is an organization that helps make the world without organized crimes, such as drugs, terrorism, and wildlife trafficking.

TRAFFIC: A leading NGO, a non-governmental organization operating worldwide in wildlife trades to combat wildlife trafficking problems.

KWS: The Kenya Wildlife Service is a state corporation established by an Act of Parliament that works to preserve Kenya's wildlife. It enforces laws and regulations regarding protecting the Kenyan environment.

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