



15 May 2014 – The staggering sum of over \$8 billion USD, reaped annually from poaching, ranks it alongside trafficking of human beings, arms and drugs in terms of illicit profits. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), stresses that the illegal wildlife trade needs to be recognized everywhere for what it is: a serious form of transnational organized crime, requiring effective legislation and criminal justice systems.

The international community is struggling to tackle illegal wildlife trade, which is causing the populations of some of the most charismatic and endangered species on Earth to crash to critical levels. Last year, 1,004 rhinos were killed in South Africa alone, and more than 25,000 elephants were killed by poachers across Africa. That is three elephants every hour, every day. Most participants at the high-level summit on wildlife crime that took place in London last February agreed that the current approach is not working.

Some, such as the WWF, have developed new methods of protecting endangered species such as the Black rhino in South Africa. By airlifting them by helicopter to new habitats, farther from human interference, they hope to boost the growth of the species. Yet, elephants and rhinos are not the only species threatened. Snakes, lizards, [migratory birds](#) – virtually every species is worth something to someone, and the world is dealing with an unprecedented spike in illegal wildlife trade, threatening to overturn decades of conservation gains.

Working with various partners, the UNODC seeks to improve international legislation, strengthen law enforcement and criminal justice systems to ensure punitive measures are applied to criminals in source countries and end markets. UNODC will soon be launching the Global Programme for Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime whose main aims are to accomplish the above-mentioned tasks.

Mr. Jochen Danninger, Austrian State Secretary of Finance and Customs, introduced a practical demonstration of a search conducted by a canine squad. Mr. Danninger explained that Austria had two sniffer dogs working at Vienna airport trained to detect specimens protected by the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#). “Last June, one dog became very interested in the luggage of a passenger arriving from Bali. When the luggage was inspected by customs they found 60 smuggled birds, 21 of them protected by CITES. Some of the birds were packed in cardboard rolls. The result was that 37 birds were already dead on arrival.”

As many experts argue, the world does not need pompous statements about the world facing a wildlife crisis; 1,000 dead rhinos in 2013 make this clear. What is needed instead is a commitment to use mathematics and solid science to save the planet’s endangered animals. Kenya, for instance, plans to deploy surveillance drones to help fight elephant and rhino poachers and has introduced stiffer penalties for offenders. Kenya has emerged as a major transit route for ivory destined for [Asian markets](#) from eastern and central Africa.

The London Conference that took place in February 2014 has added to the political commitments expressed in Paris, Gaborone, Marrakesh and Bishkek in 2013. “We must now translate our resolve into concrete action and channel this momentum into the General Assembly,” the UNODC head stated.