



## **OPERATION COBRA II PRESS RELEASE – 10<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2014**

### **African, Asian and North American Law Enforcement Officers Team up to Apprehend Wildlife Criminals**

Law Enforcement officers from 28 countries today announced that they completed a joint one month global operation on January 27<sup>th</sup>, code-named “Operation Cobra II” targeting wildlife criminals. The global wildlife law enforcement operation was coordinated by two International Coordination Teams (ICTs) based in Nairobi and Bangkok respectively, and was conducted under the auspices of the Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF) and China’s National Inter-agency CITES Enforcement Coordination Group (NICECG), with links to countries across Africa, Asia and the USA. Operation Cobra II resulted in over 400 arrests and more than 350 major wildlife seizures. The cooperative effort also saw the first ever joint China-Africa undercover sting operation that identified and arrested members of a major ivory trafficking syndicate.

During Operation Cobra II, investigators from participating countries joined together with the World Customs Organization (WCO), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), INTERPOL, LATF, ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) and the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) and exchanged real time intelligence on a daily basis, targeting poachers and traffickers of endangered elephants, rhinos, tigers, pangolins, turtles and other species sought by criminals.

The operation resulted in the seizure of 36 rhino horns, over 3 metric tons of elephant ivory, over 10,000 turtles, over 1,000 skins of protected species, over 10,000 European Eels and more than 200 metric tons of rosewood logs. More than 400 criminals were arrested in Asia and Africa. Several of those arrested included trafficking kingpins. In addition, new intelligence on poaching and trafficking syndicates was accumulated, arming governments to continue investigations with increasingly clearer targets. Operation coordinators also evaluated Cobra II and made joint plans for continuing and improving their cross border operations in the future.

Organized by LATF, China, USA, South Africa, ASEAN-WEN and SAWEN, the Operation brought together Customs, police and wildlife authorities to combat wildlife crime in Botswana, Brunei-Darussalam, Burundi, Cambodia, China including Hong Kong SAR, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Liberia, Malawi, Malaysia, Myanmar, Mozambique, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, USA, Viet Nam, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Prior to the operation, a training and planning meeting for ICT members and national coordinators were organized by LATF and the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), which comprises the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO) respectively. The training strengthened the skills of law enforcement officers to combat transnational organized wildlife crime more effectively through the use of a broad range of innovative and specialized investigation techniques. It further exposed these officers to hands on training on the use of tools and services available to them through ICWC partner

agencies. During Operation COBRA II, CENcomm, the WCO's secure and encrypted communication tool was used to exchange crucial intelligence and information and to coordinate operational activities. WCO's Regional Intelligence Liaison Offices for the Asia and the Pacific (RILO A/P) and Eastern and Southern Africa (RILO ESA) sent officers to the ICT in Bangkok and Nairobi. INTERPOL and the CITES Secretariat coordinated follow-up investigations into several seizures, including the collection of samples of confiscated specimens for DNA profiling.

Many of the members of ICT are also part of the "Special Investigation Group" on wildlife crime ("SIG"), which grew out of ASEAN-WEN's 10 member countries and now includes global memberships. The SIG has been conducting joint training or investigation sessions for 5 years, with support from the USAID-sponsored Asia's Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking (ARREST) Program, China and ASEAN-WEN.

Mr. Bonaventure Ebayi, the LATF Director said that "the success of operation Cobra II came from the successful coordination, cooperation and the intelligence generated to combat wildlife crime syndicates." As he pointed out that "in as much as the seizures of contrabands were very good, but the real impact was in the intelligence gained, networks developed and the number of investigations, arrests and prosecution of the suspects behind these illegal shipments."

Mr. Wan Ziming, the NICECG coordinator highly commended the operation: "This operation turns words into action by implementing commitments made by our governments in various summits, conferences and conventions. We brought all stakeholders together to create best practices, facilitate cooperation, and coordinate interceptions of wildlife traffickers and follow-up investigations."

Follow-up investigations are still ongoing in among many Asian and African countries. In addition, many best practices have been created, such as: China and Kenya joining hands under the coordination of LATF and NICECG to arrest and deport a notorious wildlife smuggler from Kenya to China for prosecution; the interception of an illegal shipment of rosewood logs originating from Madagascar in Tanzania based on intelligence provided by ICCWC partners to the ICT and then communicated to Tanzania; the seizure and repatriation of 2,700 confiscated pig-nose turtles from Hong Kong SAR to Indonesia; and the collection of samples from the confiscated ivory in Uganda for DNA analysis.

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