



2015

OPERATION COBRA II EVALUATION REPORT



LUSAKA AGREEMENT TASK FORCE

March 2015



Table of contents

SUMMARY	ii
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Aims/Objectives of Operation COBRA:	2
1.2 Overview	2
1.3 Preparations operation for Cobra II	3
1.4 Operation execution	5
2.0 COBRA II REVIEW MEETING	7
2.1 Objective of the review meeting	7
2.2 Successes and findings	8
2.3 Best practices	10
3.0 PLANNING SESSION FOR OPERATION COBRA III	11
4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	12
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	13



SUMMARY

This report provides an evaluation of Operation Cobra II, including an account of achievements and recommendations arrived at during a review meeting held in Bangkok Thailand from 21 – 24 September 2015. Operation Cobra II was a multi-regional law enforcement operation implemented in 28 African and Asian countries from 30th December 2013 to 26th January 2014. It was undertaken and expanded on following the successes of Operation Cobra I, which was conducted in 22 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America in early 2013.

Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF) chaired and coordinated Operation Cobra II. Other organizers included the Association of South East Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) as well as China, USA and South Africa. Cobra II brought together officers and investigators from Police, Customs and Wildlife departments in 28 countries in Africa and Asia. it resulted in 240 reported and at least 110 unreported seizures relating to over 111,203.6 kg and 26,486 pieces of assorted contraband wildlife specimens including 36 rhino horns, over 3 metric tons of elephant ivory, over 10,000 turtles, over 1,000 skins of endangered species, over 10,000 European Eels and more than 200 metric tons of rosewood logs. Overall, Operation Cobra II recorded arrests of more than 400 criminals including kingpins in Africa and Asia, disrupted criminal syndicates and above all generated a significant amount of intelligence and information which provided leads for investigations by various law enforcement agencies across the globe. Details of the results are documented in the report by Lusaka Agreement Task Force on behalf of the organizers shared with all partners and organizers at a meeting to review Cobra II and planning meeting for Cobra III in Bangkok Thailand.

The review meeting noted that the operation achieved most of its objectives, was a great success and recorded some best practices. The Lusaka Agreement Task Force, China and Kenya (LATF) were awarded Certificates of Commendation for collaborative efforts to take down an international criminal syndicate smuggling ivory from Kenya to China. The joint action occurred during Operation COBRA II and resulted in the extradition of a Chinese national from Kenya to China and the arrest of more than 20 smugglers and domestic ivory traders in China implicated in the activities of the syndicate. The Certificates of Commendation presented to China's



National Inter-agencies CITES Enforcement Coordination Group on behalf of Chinese authorities, Kenya Wildlife Service on behalf of Kenyan Authorities and the Lusaka Agreement Task Force recognized the exemplary collaboration, including the daily exchange of real-time intelligence, which underpinned the joint investigation.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

In fulfilling the call for action by world leaders at various international fora and summits to combat the increasing scourge in wildlife crime, the need to undertake global operations and enhance collaboration among states became more imminent and accepted as a pragmatic way of fighting wildlife and forest crime. This high level commitments and call for action by world leaders to combat wildlife crime include among others:

- i) China - U.S. Strategic and Economic Dialogue (May 2012);
- ii) the 20th Asia Pacific Economic Commission (APEC) Vladivostok Declaration (Sept. 2012) and
- iii) the 67th UN General Assembly (Sept. 2012) on combating wildlife crime;
- iv) CITES COP 16 in Bangkok (2013);
- v) the Marakech Declaration and 10-point action plan to combat illicit wildlife trafficking (May 2013);
- vi) US President's Executive Order on combating wildlife trafficking (July 2013);
- vii) Botswana Elephant Summit's urgent measures to curtail illegal ivory trade (Dec. 2013);
- viii) Summit for Peace and Security in Africa (France-Dec. 2013)
- ix) the UN Security Council resolutions (21/34 and 21/36)
- x) the London Declaration on illegal wildlife trade (February 2014)

In June 2012, the idea to hold a global and regional operation coordinated by the International Coordination Team at a central place to facilitate sharing of Information and intelligence was conceptualized. This was during a Detecting Environmental Crime Training (DETECT) for managers and Special Investigation Group (SIG) training course organized by the Freeland Foundations' ARREST program (Asia's' Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking) with support from the US State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). This operation was codenamed "Operation Cobra". From 2012, two operations of this magnitude have been undertaken. These are Operation Cobra I in 2012/2013 and Operation Cobra II in 2013/2014. A third Operation Cobra III has been planned to be undertaken in May 2015.



This report provides an evaluation of Operation Cobra II, including an account of achievements and recommendations arrived at during a review meeting held in Bangkok Thailand from 21 – 24 September 2015. Operation Cobra II was a multi-regional law enforcement operation implemented in 28 African and Asian countries from 30th December 2013 to 26th January 2014. It was undertaken and expanded on following the successes of Operation Cobra I, which was conducted in 22 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America in early 2013.

1.1 Aims/Objectives of Operation COBRA:

- i) Implement the commitments of high level conferences by world leaders;
- ii) Detect, suppress and apprehend criminals and disrupt criminal networks that exploit Elephants, rhinos, pangolins, big cats and great apes in Africa and Asia;
- iii) Regionally gather information and intelligence on the illegal exploitation of Elephants, rhinos, pangolins, big cats, great ape and other wildlife;
- iv) Increase public awareness of crimes relating to the illegal exploitation of wildlife and reduce the illegal supply and demand of wildlife;
- v) Build wildlife law enforcement capacity nationally and regionally;
- vi) Mobilize departmental support and political will for wildlife law enforcement; and
- vii) Enhance communication, co-operation and coordination between Africa and Asia and among range, transit and consumer states with respect to combating the illegal trade in wildlife;

1.2 Overview

Operation Cobra was initiated in 2012 during the fourth (4th) Special Investigation Group (SIG) course held from September 17-21, 2012 at the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok, Thailand. The course participants included mid to senior level law enforcement investigation managers from wildlife crime hotspots from Cameroon, Gabon, People's Republic of China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nepal, Thailand, Viet Nam, Lao PDR,



Malaysia, Indonesia, Republic of South Africa, USA, and Lusaka Agreement Task Force. The course was supported by the US State Department International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs through the ARREST Program.

During the course participants recommended to conduct a cooperative enforcement operation where investigation information would be shared among countries and investigators in “real time” targeting the upper levels of organized wildlife criminal groups. China agreed to take the lead to organize and chair the first joint enforcement effort Code named “Operation Cobra” by the SIG participants.

Operation Cobra I was therefore held between January 6 and February 5, 2013 and was coordinated internationally from Bangkok, Thailand by an International Coordination Team (ICT). Members of the ICT included representatives from ASEAN-WEN, LATF, China NICECG, WCO RILO A/P, SA-WEN, USFWS and India WCCB, and policemen from Indonesia, Nepal, South Africa, Thailand and Vietnam. At field and investigative level, operation participants included wildlife, customs and police officers from 22 Asian, African and North American countries, namely Botswana, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Congo (Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Laos, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Singapore, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, USA, Vietnam and Zambia.

1.3 Preparations operation for Cobra II

Prior to Cobra II, in collaboration with LATF, the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) delivered a two-day cutting-edge training workshop to wildlife law enforcement officials from 21 countries in Nairobi, Kenya, from 30 to 31 October 2013. The training strengthened the skills of law enforcement officers from across Africa and Asia, 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 ICCWC partner agencies and highlighted the importance of increased international collaboration, to facilitate



multidisciplinary investigations and law enforcement responses across range, transit and destination States, targeting the sophisticated criminal networks behind transnational organized wildlife crime to bring the kingpins behind these networks to justice.



The training was followed by a pre-operational planning meeting organized by LATF and supported by ICCWC. The planning meeting discussed and strategized on modalities of executing operation Cobra II, internalizing and owning the operation plan among participating countries, focus of the operation as well as the secure communication system to be used during the operation.

The training and planning meeting generated enormous enthusiasm among operation coordinators which quickly brought about a number of significant seizures before, during and after the operation. Coordinators relied on CENcomm, the WCO's secure and encrypted



communication tool, to exchange actionable intelligence and to coordinate their operational activities. RILO-AP verified and analyzed the operation data.

The planning and training event was coordinated by the CITES Secretariat, in close collaboration with its ICCWC partners [INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO)] and the LATF. The event was made possible through funds generously provided to ICCWC by the government of Sweden.

1.4 Operation execution

Operation cobra II was coordinated from two ICTs based in Nairobi and Bangkok. The ICT received information from the National Coordinators from operational activities at national level and passed on information to affected countries for action. During the initial days of Operation Cobra II, participating countries exchanged intelligence and information bilaterally/multilaterally including undertaking follow-up investigations at national level. The national coordinators ensured that field operation where undertaken at national level, keyed in seizure data in CENcomm and ensured that information flowed to the ICT. The ICT shared and followed up with respective participating countries providing technical support and guidance on arrests and seizures during the operation. The two ICTs in Nairobi and Bangkok were supported by the INL.



Members of ICT – Nairobi Team



Member of the ICT - Bangkok Team



2.0 COBRA II REVIEW MEETING

The Operation Cobra II review meeting took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 21 – 23 October 2014. The meeting drew 47 participants from the key organizers and participants of Operation Cobra II who included LATF, China NICECG, ASEAN WEN, SAWEN and South Africa. The participants were also drawn from 16 Operation Cobra II participating countries which included China and Hong Kong SAR; From ASEAN WEN Countries: Thailand, LAO PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines and Malaysia. From SA-WEN countries: Nepal. From Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Also in attendance included INTERPOL, WCO, CITES Secretariat, UNODC, USF-WS, EU representatives and China Wildlife Conservation Association as well as NGOs mainly involved in supporting the Operation in one way or the other. These included Freeland Foundation and Global Environmental Institute China. The UK Border Force and the United States Homeland Security were also represented at this meeting.

The review session of Cobra II mainly involved the following:

- Presentations of the results of Operation Cobra II including Arrests, Seizures, Prison Terms and Information gathered in the Operational areas in Africa, South East Asia, China and South Asia where discussed.
- Achievements against the objectives of the operation
- Updates on Significant Cobra II Investigations and other investigations at the national, regional and international Levels

2.1 Objective of the review meeting

The review meeting evaluated Operation Cobra II with regard to meeting the objectives as set out in the operational plan. In this respect the meeting reviewed the report provided by Lusaka Agreement Task Force which took an account of Operation Cobra II, including results, finding and recommendations.



Overall, the operation objectives in terms of country and international perspective were achieved with good results. Quality relationships and contacts have been established therefore strengthening cooperation which demonstrates a high level commitment and excellent work of interagency law enforcement officers.

2.2 Successes and findings

The success of operation Cobra II is mainly attributed to the successful coordination, cooperation and the intelligence generated to combat wildlife crime syndicates among participating countries and Agencies. As a result of the Intelligence shared, the Operation recorded a high amount of seizures and also developed networks including follow-up investigations culminating in the arrests and prosecutions of the suspects behind these illegal shipments.

Operation Cobra II produced a high number of significant wildlife seizures, arrests, prosecutions and achievements of best practices among the participating authorities. The operation resulted in the seizure of unprecedented amounts of wildlife parts and products, including: 36 rhino horns, over 3 metric tons of elephant ivory, over 10,000 turtles, over 1,000 skins of endangered species, over 10,000 European Eels and more than 200 metric tons of rosewood logs. Most importantly, the operation also resulted in the arrest of more than 400 criminals in Asia and Africa. Several of those arrested were trafficking kingpins. In addition, Operation Cobra II saw several 'firsts' in international wildlife crime cooperation and prosecution, including: The sentencing of a Chinese ivory smuggler in Tanzania to 20 years in jail and the first ever joint China-Africa cooperative investigation and surveillance operation that identified and arrested members of a major Chinese ivory trafficking syndicate based in Nairobi.



Eight (8) rhinoceros horns seized in Singapore during cobra II



Nine (9) rhinoceros horns seized in Bangkok, Thailand during Operation cobra II

The detailed results of Operation Cobra II are well documented in the report produced by the Lusaka Agreement Task Force on behalf of the Organizers and participating countries. The report was distributed to all stakeholders at a meeting to review the Cobra II in Bangkok in 2015. The review meeting noted that operation achieved most of its objective and was a great success. Of the successes, the following were highlighted to be major successes:

- 240 seizures during the one month operational period and those before or after that, not only demonstrated the high level commitment and excellent work of the interagency law enforcement officers in source, transit and destination countries of the wildlife contraband, but also brought out the magnitude and the sheer challenges faced within the Law enforcement fraternity all over the world.
- The use of WCOs CENComm a secure communication tool during the operation enhanced the sharing of information. All ICT members enhanced their cooperation among themselves, and national agencies. The use of CENComm helped create a new era of collective efforts for future wildlife enforcement. However, there exist discrepancies in the use of the system especially in data input. Information was not uniformly inputted which calls for more training on the CENComm to strengthen data inputting in future operation. In this respect ICT members requested to keep CENcomm running after Cobra II and more training on the use of the system.



- More screening effort should be made for checked in luggage as well;
- The analysis of results also showed that the most preferred trafficking mode of large quantities of ivory is by use of vessels from the ports;
- The operation also recorded high volumes of illegal pangolin trade, especially in Asia. The seizures of both pangolin scales and frozen pangolins in the operation should be a basis for law enforcement Agencies in Asia and Africa to direct more effort in curtailing this rising scourge.
- Real time information sharing during the operation was vital to the success, for instance the interception seizure of 110 tons of rosewood logs at Zanzibar port from Madagascar, was a result of real time intelligence exchange between the participating countries and agencies.
- The participation of senior officers as ICT members enhanced the flow of information from national coordinators and this should be encouraged in future operations. The real time exchange/sharing of information, made the flow of communication easily and efficiently. A lot of intelligence was shared, especially seizure information and telephone links of suspects. Information from the national coordinators flowed smoothly to the ICT. However, coordination through two ICT bases was a bit difficult as the roles for each seem to be the same. In future there is a need to relook at the size and representation at the ICT. There is need to involve WCO RILOs, and INTERPOL in future operational exercises to facilitate quick actionable information sharing.
- Delays in disbursement of funds to participating agencies/countries were critical. Several elements might have been attributable to the fact that funds from some of the supporters were delayed, thus a number of beneficial countries did not receive funds to support the execution and this could have resulted to some identified hot spots not to be covered.

2.3 Best practices

The review meeting noted and recognized the achievement of best practices during Operation Cobra II. These included:



- the first Chinese-African joint sting operation that dismantled a major ivory trafficking syndicate and the extradition of Chinese criminals from Kenya to China for prosecution Also leading to the apprehension of 23 other suspects in China;
- Real time sharing of intelligence leading to detection of 110 tons rosewood logs in Tanzania;
- Ivory sampling and DNA profiling in Uganda;
- Training for the Chinese community in Kenya;
- African law enforcement officers follow-up meeting and information exchange with their Chinese counterparts in April 2014 to share intelligence and evidence on suspects arrested during Cobra II;
- Networking and continuous sharing of Intelligence and information through WCO CEN-comm.
- The sentencing of a Chinese ivory smuggler arrested during operation Cobra II in Tanzania to 20 years in jail.

3.0 PLANNING SESSION FOR OPERATION COBRA III

During the review meeting for Cobra II, the meeting also discussed the planning of Operation Cobra III. The matter discussed included identifying who will Chair/Host Operation Cobra III, Venue/location of the International Coordination Team, and Length of the Operation, Focus and ICT Participants. The meeting welcomed the inclusion of INTERPOL to be part of Operation Cobra III and recommended that ICCWC partners should play a supportive and coordination role during the operation. The meeting resolved and recommended the following that:

- Operation Cobra continues to be a country driven;
- the organizing and coordination of Cobra III at regional level is left to the relevant Inter Governmental Agencies and Wildlife enforcement Networks such as LATF, ASEAN WEN and SAWEN in each respective region;



- INTERPOL should be part of the organizers of COBRA III and their involvement should be to coordinate the different IGOs and WENS at global level and to provide technical and financial support to the regional networks;
- the working mechanisms which already exist are maintained in Cobra III. This includes the already nominated and ICCWC trained national coordinators and International Coordination Team members;
- CENcomm is maintained as a secure communication tool for exchange of information, Intelligence and seizure data;
- To use I24/7 especially on matters that cannot be achieved through CENcomm such as INTERPOL notices, diffusions and follow-ups;
- To develop clear defined roles and functions of the players in Cobra III, such as ICCWC, Regional WENs and supporters and ensure that resources to support operations at national level are factored in.;
- To use in as much as possible the available local expertise to handle investigations and only call upon INTERPOL experts on a need basis.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The meeting recommended continuing conducting regular inter-regional operations against wildlife crime with more countries affected by the supply chain of wildlife contrabands involved. At the meeting, INTERPOL informed the participants that it had secured funds to support Operation Cobra III. The review meeting recommend among others to ensure that the following are implemented:

- that ICCWC may consider to support joint planning and training sessions before commencement of operations to serve as a catalyst for exchange of information and cooperation in order to maximize efficiency during the operation;
- Follow-up investigations and prosecutions strongly encouraged during and after the operation;



- Participating countries should be notified in time to prepare and mobilize human and financial resources at national level.
- That the ASEAN WEN will chair and lead the next Operation Cobra III;
- That Operation Cobra III will be hosted in Bangkok, Thailand where the International Coordination team will be convened;
- LATF, China NICECG, SAWEN, USA, South Africa will be part of the organizing team;
- That INTERPOL will co-chair Operation Cobra III with ASEAN-WEN.
- That participating countries would use their available resources in Operation Cobra III in addition to the support provided by ICCWC.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of organizations, agencies and donors were integral to the success of Operation Cobra II. In this respect we are very grateful to a number of organizations and donors who financially supported Operation Cobra II and these include the U.S. State Department Bureau of Narcotics and International Law Enforcement Affairs, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA) and the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives implemented by the Canadian Government. We also appreciate the support provided by ICCWC for the pre-operation training and planning meeting for Operation cobra II. Our special thanks also to RILO-AP for quality check and analysis of operation data.

We recognize with much appreciation the support received from the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Freeland Foundation, an international counter-trafficking organization and LATF for mobilizing financial support and providing the logistical and training support as well as tip-off information on wildlife trafficking syndicates.

The Cobra II review and planning meeting for Cobra III was supported by U.S. State Department, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), ARREST program (Asia's Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking) United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Freeland Foundation. We also appreciate the support by China and IFAW for funding the participation of African States and LATF



respectively at the Operation Cobra II review meeting and planning meeting for Operation Cobra III in Bangkok Thailand.

Lastly but not the least, our special thanks and appreciation go to all the 28 countries that participated in Operation Cobra II. Their effort, support to the Operation and tenacity in investigating the various wildlife and forestry specimen seized before, during and after the operation is commendable. It is a result of this coordination, cooperation and networking among the countries involved that Operation Cobra II was a success.

Headquartered in Nairobi Kenya, LATF is an intergovernmental law enforcement Agency established in 1999 and the Secretariat as well as the operational arm of the Lusaka Agreement on Cooperative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora, also known as the Lusaka Final Act 1994. The Agreement which is listed as a United Nations Environmental Treaty no XXVII.11, Registration no 33409, was adopted in 1994 in Lusaka, Zambia and is open for accession to all African states. LATF is mandated to combat transnational illegal trade in wildlife and forestry resources mainly through fostering inter-state cooperation and collaboration among agencies. It has achieved significant milestones in bridging source, transit and destination countries of wildlife contraband through executing and coordinating national, regional and multi-regional enforcement operations, undertaking capacity building programmes, gathering and sharing of relevant intelligence, carrying out investigations into violations of biodiversity laws and facilitating compliance with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and biodiversity related conventions. In discharging its mandate, LATF works closely with and receives support from national enforcement agencies and international partners of mutual interest such as UNEP, CITES, WCO, INTERPOL, UNODC, RECSA, ICCWC COMIFAC Secretariats and Governments. It also collaborates with research institutions e.g. Faculty of Biology – Washington University, UNU-Japan, ICT-UT-Netherlands and conservation NGOs such as IFAW, TRAFFIC International, WWF, AWF, WCS etc in supporting government efforts towards combating wildlife crime. The work of LATF is guided by provisions of the Lusaka Final Act 1994 and other biodiversity related conventions/agreements/protocols, Operational Rules, Financial Rules, Rules and Procedures and Decisions of the Governing Council of the Parties to Lusaka Agreement and the strategic plan. LATF operations are regularly reviewed by an Implementing Committee comprising Ministers and Experts from member states evaluated by UNEP and annually audited by independent qualified firms appointed by the Governing Council of the Parties. It operates under a legally binding Headquarters Agreement signed with the Government of Kenya in 2001 and has the legal authority to sue and to be sued. Rule of law and compliance, zero tolerance on corruption and respect of human rights, gender equity and transparency, being innovative and outstanding in fighting wildlife crime are key principals of the Lusaka Agreement Task Force.