



# **WORKSHOP REPORT**

## **INTER-MINISTERIAL MEETING ON ENHANCING COORDINATION TO COMBAT WILDLIFE CRIME**

Held 26<sup>th</sup> April 2018

**VENUE: LAKE VICTORIA SERENA HOTEL-KIGO, UGANDA**

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## INTER-MINISTERIAL MEETING ON ENHANCING COORDINATION TO COMBAT WILDLIFE CRIME IN UGANDA

### INTRODUCTION

Wildlife crime and trafficking practice have increasingly become a transnational threat that is undermining Uganda's tourism and national security as well as international legislations. Uganda, alongside Kenya and Tanzania, were named among the "gang of eight" worst offending countries in the ivory trade at the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of Parties (CoP16) of CITES (Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora) in Bangkok. Uganda has registered an upsurge in wildlife product trafficking since 2010. In the past five (5) years alone, approximately 9961.45kg of ivory, 17.75kg of rhino horn and 1,374.7kg of pangolin scales have been confiscated in the country. Seizure incidents of elephant ivory in Uganda now total to 15,172.75kg. The monetary value of seized ivory, rhino horns and pangolins/scales is worth USD 19, 922,900, USD 1, 153,750, and USD 687,350 respectively. Unfortunately, Uganda gets no revenue from this illicit trade since the products involved are sold illegally and payments to traffickers and illegal wildlife traders occur outside Uganda.

Poaching, IWT and trafficking activities are also a major threat to national security and economic prosperity that could impact heavily on Uganda's economic development, particularly the tourism industry. For instance, in June 2013, a report released by Enough and the Satellite Sentinel Projects reported that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) while in Garamba heavily relied on elephant poaching and ivory trade to finance their operations (to buy arms, ammunition and food)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://enoughproject.org/reports/konys-ivory-how-elephant-poaching-congo-helps-support-lords-resistance-army>

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Combating illegal  
wildlife trade and  
trafficking in Uganda  
requires concerted  
inter-agency efforts  
and coordination.



This Inter-Ministerial Meeting On Enhancing Coordination to Combat Wildlife Crime in Uganda was organized by the Ministry of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities (MTWA) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in recognition of the fact that any successful strategy to stamp out wildlife trafficking and to redeem Uganda's image requires the involvement of key institutions and decision-makers in their respective dockets to establish a coordination framework to enhance strategic apex collaboration. The meeting was funded by the UK government's IWT Challenge Fund through partner WCS. The meeting took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2018 at Serena Victoria Hotel, Kigo adjacent to Kampala and was presided over by the Minister for Wildlife, Tourism and Antiquities, Professor Ephraim Kamuntu, who also represented the Prime Minister of Uganda. It involves high level dignitaries from the relevant government ministries, government departments and non-governmental organisations.

## **Meeting Objectives**

The overall goal of the inter-ministerial meeting was to bring together the relevant Ministries and heads of national security and law enforcement agencies to appreciate the magnitude of wildlife crime and explore ways of strengthening joint collaboration to combat poaching, illegal wildlife trade, wildlife trafficking and associated crimes which could facilitate terrorism activities if they continue unchallenged. The specific objectives were:

- i) To raise awareness at the high political level on the risks and negative impacts of poaching, IWT and trafficking to the nation among security, law enforcement and other relevant institutions/agencies.
- ii) To discuss the idea of establishing a national wildlife crime coordination task force (NWCCTF) comprising of security, law enforcement and other relevant agencies.
- iii) To combat organized wildlife crimes and trafficking in and through Ugandan boundaries in collaboration with anti-terrorism units.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

To set the pace for discussion, three key presentations were made:

1. State of wildlife crime in Uganda: Current interventions and challenges (by Charles Tumwesigye, the Deputy Director Field Operations, UWA). This presentation gave a historical perspective of wildlife crime and trafficking, highlighting the common local and international wildlife crimes encountered in Uganda. It also highlighted the implications on international policy and conventions as well as the challenges faced in addressing the vice
2. The Zero Poaching Strategy as a means to combating wildlife crime and trafficking (by Simon Nampindo, Country Director WCS). This highlighted the importance of employing multifaceted approach to combating IWT at different levels beginning with improving the efficiency of law enforcement efforts in the field using tested tools such as SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) to building capacity of key institutions, improving prosecution, putting in place stringent penalties, cooperation between institutions and involving local communities among other things.
3. A case study on one trafficking case (by Amos Aijuka, Warden, Uganda Wildlife Authority). This gave a classic example of how sophisticated and intricate the IWT networks are. It

clearly demonstrated the relevance of and role that the different institutions represented in the room ought to play in combating trafficking.

4. The transboundary perspective of illegal wildlife trafficking in Uganda (by James Byamukama, Programmes Manager, Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration). This presentation gave a snapshot of how illegal wildlife products and wildlife crime traverse national boundaries and brought out the need to look at addressing IWT with a transboundary perspective.

## **KEY ISSUES**

The presentations were followed by a pulsating discussion moderated by Dr Arthur Mugisha, the Chairman of the Uganda Biodiversity Trust Fund. The key issues that emerged were as follows:

1. The criminal gangs have strong intelligence networks, which could point to existence of collaborators within the government systems
2. The source of arms that the criminals use needs to be investigated. Could the gangs be getting these arms and ammunition from state agencies?
3. Government needs to look into salaries and motivation for UWA wardens who are faced with these challenges (and enticements from the rich criminal gangs) on a regular basis
4. Due to the transboundary nature of the crime, UWA and MTWA needs to bring TRAFFIC on board
5. Wildlife outside protected areas should not be ignored
6. The wildlife trafficking criminal gang networks are very similar to that of terrorists. Thus, experience from tackling such networks shows that tackling the problem from the supply end of the chain is more effective
7. UWA should be part of the local security committees as well as national security committees
8. There is need to build credibility among the institutions in order to create trust among the institutions. The unresolved case of ivory stolen from UWA's strong room was given as a reference
9. Dealing with the supply end of the chain has to involve transboundary coordination and joint efforts
10. High level engagements should cascade to lower levels as well
11. UWA should be allowed to view the screens of cargo scanners to identify illegal wildlife products. Customs officials may not have the ability to identify wildlife contraband
12. Efforts need to be put in place to close any possible trafficking routes on L. Victoria
13. Need to come up with a common border concept in managing wildlife trafficking such that information shared should be seen or known by other parties
14. There is need to mainstream tourism in other sectors of government in order to enhance appreciation of wildlife conservation
15. Lessons should be drawn from existing initiatives/taskforces (e.g. the one in South Africa)
16. It is important to have a lead institution to lead the National Wildlife Coordination Task Force. However, the lead agency should have equipment that can be shared with other members

17. Focal persons should be appointed by each institution represented on the taskforce and the focal persons should meet regularly to get to know each other
18. Departmental bureaucracies are a big hindrance to information sharing
19. Traffickers avoid using banks for their transactions as these can easily be tracked. They have resorted to using virtual money (e.g. BitCoin)
20. Some traffickers disguise as refugees
21. Traffickers use businesses to whitewash their money
22. The assets recovery law should be fast-tracked to facilitate confiscation of properties of criminals. However, the East African Customs Management Act has a provision for seizure of property
23. There is need to build capacity of institutions to effectively engage in fighting wildlife trafficking
24. Judges should be involved to investigate irregularities in the judicial procedures that undermine wildlife trafficking cases
25. Forex bureaus offer an easy means for criminal gangs to pay and receive payment for trafficking. The central bank needs to be involved to deal with unlicensed forex bureaus
26. There is need to put in place a payment enforcement law to monitor transactions. Mobile money is currently not monitored.

## **KEY RESOLUTIONS**

As a way forward, the following resolutions were made

1. A National Wildlife Coordination Task Force to be put in place to coordinate efforts to combat wildlife crime
2. Each institution represented to designate a desk officer to represent the institutions on the task force
3. The Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities to write to relevant institutions asking them to designate a desk officers
4. In the same communication in 2 above, MTWA to invite taskforce members to the first coordination meeting
5. UWA to coordinate quarterly meetings of the task force
6. Civil Society Organisations to remain on the periphery to play a facilitator role
7. The Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration to facilitate transboundary engagements
8. Mainstream capacity building to combat IWT within member institutions
9. The terms of reference to be defined in relation to the working mechanisms or specific tasks to be handled in a given time

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