



HONG KONG'S IVORY TRADE



THE ISSUE

In January 2019, Hong Kong Customs seized more than 1,000 Central African forest elephant tusks shipped from Nigeria. Regrettably, this further confirms Hong Kong's role as one of the world's most notorious hubs for the trade in illegal wildlife. The great number of tusks seized also portends the wholesale loss of elephants in Central African forests in the very near future.

To save these elephants, it is imperative to stop poachers and other illegal wildlife trade operators in Central Africa, as well as among the government authorities, military, and rebel and terrorist groups that all too often provide protection to the cartels and facilitate and drive the illegal trade, from profiting from it.

Ivory is all too easily 'repackaged' as 'legal' ivory when loopholes and allowed sales exist. Only a total ban on the trade and sale of all ivory, including African savanna and Asian elephants, will save Africa's forest elephants. And it is critical that this ban be backed by strong enforcement, prosecutions, penalties, awareness-raising, and other effective deterrents.

Only 40,000 forest elephants are estimated to remain, roughly 10%-15% of their estimated original population. The recent Hong Kong ivory seizure representing at least 500 elephants may be just one of several shipped each year to Hong Kong. Even if it was one of only four, for example (globally, Customs agencies estimate, on average, that 1 in 10 intercepted is typical), that would translate into 2,000 dead elephants a year. African forest elephants would be eliminated within 20 years under this scenario. Unfortunately, four is likely a gross underestimate of the number of containers of ivory being shipped to Hong Kong and other Asian ports each year, so the near complete loss of African forest elephants within 10 years is the most realistic trajectory without the immediate complete ban and robust enforcement.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Hong Kong is the world's largest ivory city market and a major transit hub for illegal wildlife trade due to low fines and sentences for traffickers and zero prosecutions of the criminal kingpins. A research indicated that there were over 30,000 ivory items found in Hong Kong's retail shops and the city has the world's largest ivory retail market city. Over 90% of the ivory objects in Hong Kong are bought by mainland Chinese. Hong Kong has an essential role to play in stopping the illicit trade.

Globally, WWF is at the forefront of global efforts to stop elephant poaching and illegal ivory trade, which threaten the future of elephant populations across Africa. WWF does not support the resumption of the international, commercial elephant ivory trade. WWF supports the closure of domestic markets for elephant ivory worldwide. Closing off loopholes and opportunities for repackaging ivory and paperwork is essential.

OUR ASK

Hong Kong and other Asian markets for ivory have only a short window of time to enact and enforce complete ivory bans and, thereby, reduce the perception of potential profit among ivory cartels and poachers in Central Africa. Anything short of this simply will not work and forest elephants will be lost.

We urge Hong Kong and China, more broadly, to continue to provide leadership to other Asian nations through the decisive and immediate actions that are required to save the last of the world's elephants. Elephants are running out of time.

China's ivory ban went into effect at the end of 2017. Whereas a ban on the domestic ivory trade with no compensation by 2021 and an increase in the maximum penalty for wildlife crime offences to 10 years was passed into law by Hong Kong's Legislative Council on 31 January 2018. WWF calls on governments across Asia to follow China and Hong Kong's lead and close their ivory markets

To further deter the illicit trade, WWF-Hong Kong urges the Hong Kong government to take wildlife crime as a serious crime. Wildlife smuggling should be included under Schedule 1 of the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance (OSCO) to further deter transnational criminal enterprises that use Hong Kong as a major port and transportation hub for illegal wildlife trade. The government must strictly implement CITES, ensuring that the relevant regulations are effectively and comprehensively enforced in ports and in business. We must do more by treating wildlife crime as a predicate offence for money laundering and use Anti-Money Laundering (AML) tools in the prosecution of wildlife crime offences, in compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 30.

WWF-Hong Kong supports our network offices to target Chinese travellers to stop buying ivory where it can still be found.