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Declaration signed on illegal wildlife trade

By Rebecca Morelle Science reporter, BBC World Service



Some organisations want to have all ivory sales banned and stockpiles destroyed

Governments from around the world have vowed to take action on the illegal trade in wildlife.

At the conference at Lancaster House in London, delegates from 46 different countries and 11 UN organisations have signed The London Declaration.

This outlines the steps that need to be taken to stop animal poaching, which governments agreed needs to be treated as a serious crime.

The illegal trade in wildlife is worth about \$19bn dollars a year.

The London declaration states that investigating the links to corruption and organised crime needs to be made a priority.

The 46 countries have also committed to improving cross border cooperation - and to strengthening laws and policing.

Analysis

Rebecca Morelle Science reporter, BBC World Service

The London Declaration could be a pivotal moment for wildlife.

With four African presidents - as well as delegates from China and Vietnam - among the signatories, the illegal animal trade has been pushed from the conservation agenda to the political one.

But now the hard work begins.

The commitments agreed will need to be put into action - fast. Conservationists urge that there's no time to spare because the survival of these key species is on the line.

But has the declaration gone far enough - especially when it comes to the ivory trade?

Some NGOs have called for a total ban of all ivory sales and the destruction of stockpiles around the world.

Without this, they say, poaching is unlikely to stop.

With tens of thousands of rhinos, elephants and tigers being killed each year, these species face a real risk of extinction.

The bulk of poaching takes place in Africa, but much of the demand comes from Asia, where animal products, such as rhino horns, are used in traditional medicine or are bought by the rich as trophies.

Speaking at the conference, the UK's Foreign Secretary William Hague said: "The illegal wildlife trade is a global problem and it matters deeply to all of us gathered here today.

"We need to show the world our political commitment at the highest level across the globe to addressing this before it is too late."

Actions from the meeting include:

- Treat wildlife trade as a serious crime within the UN convention against transnational organised crime
- Address problems of corruption and money laundering related to wildlife crime with legislation - a zero tolerance policy
- Strengthen legal frameworks and help law enforcement
- Better cross-agency mechanisms to deal with wildlife crime
- Endorsing governments which are destroying wildlife products
- Renounce governments which use products from species threatened with extinction

Conservationists broadly welcomed the news, but they say action will be needed to be taken quickly.

Heather Sohl, chief species adviser at WWF-UK, said: "Governments signing the London Declaration today sent a strong message: Wildlife crime is a serious crime and it must be stopped.

"This trafficking devastates species populations, but also takes the lives of rangers, impedes countries' economic development and destabilises society by driving corruption."

Dr John G Robinson, chief conservationist at the Wildlife Conservation Society, said the illegal trade involved "well-financed and well-armed syndicates".

He commented: "The declaration calls for governments to crack down on these criminals with stiffer penalties and more aggressive investigation and prosecution, including addressing the corruption and bribery that facilitate these crimes.

"It further calls for addressing this crisis at all points of the supply chain - where the animal is killed, where the parts are trafficked, and where the products are purchased."

Prince Charles and The Duke of Cambridge, Prince William, attended the meeting, hosted by the UK government.

The conference heard from the presidents of Botswana, Chad, Gabon and Tanzania, and the foreign minister of Ethiopia.

President Khama of Botswana said that he would put the country's ivory stockpiles out of reach of the markets.

As an additional pledge, the leaders of Botswana, Chad, Gabon and Tanzania have agreed to a moratorium on the ivory trade for at least 10 years, as part of an elephant protection initiative.

While the trade of ivory has been banned under CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) since 1989, some states have been granted permission to sell their ivory stocks in the past.

In 1999, CITES authorised a "one-off" sale of stockpiled ivory from Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia to Japan, and in 2008 Namibia, Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe sold their stocks to buyers in China and Japan.

In essence, by issuing a 10-year moratorium, the four African states are saying they will uphold the ban, and not ask for permission from CITES to sell any of their ivory.

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Declaration sought on illegal wildlife trade

By Rebecca Morelle Science reporter, BBC World Service



Conservationists believe there are just 3,200 tigers left in the wild

Leaders from 40 states are gathering in London to discuss the illegal wildlife trade.

The aim is to draw up a global declaration that will tackle animal trafficking.

Prince Charles and The Duke of Cambridge, Prince William, will attend the meeting, hosted by the government.

Conservationists say poaching has reached a crisis point: tens of thousands of elephants, rhinos and tigers are being slaughtered each year.

The WWF estimates that the animal black market is worth \$19bn (£12bn) a year.

The bulk of poaching takes place in Africa, but much of the demand comes from Asia, where animal products, such as rhino horns, are used in traditional medicine or are bought by the rich as trophies.

The UK's Foreign Secretary William Hague said that delegates at the meeting held at Lancaster House on Thursday would be adopting an "ambitious and powerful" London declaration.

This would include a commitment to renouncing the use of any products from species at threat of extinction and a promise to support the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) ban on the international trade on ivory until elephant populations have stabilised.

He also said that poaching and trafficking should be treated as a serious crime, in the same category as drugs, arms and people trafficking.

He added: "The illegal wildlife trade is a global problem and it matters deeply to all of us gathered here today.

"We need to show the world our political commitment at the highest level across the globe to addressing this before it is too late."

In South Africa, 1,004 rhinos were killed in 2013, and across the whole continent it is estimated that more than 20,000 elephants were slaughtered for their tusks in 2012, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The leaders of four African countries spoke at the start of the meeting.

The President of Gabon, Ali Bongo Ondimba, said: "Last year, we burnt an entire stockpile of ivory to show that Gabon has no tolerance for this."

He said his country had raised the minimum sentence for poaching to three years, and those found guilty of organised crime could be served with life in prison.

However, President Khama of Botswana said that he would put the country's ivory stockpiles out of reach of the markets and to agree to keep moratorium on the ivory trade for at least 10 years.

Delegates from Asia, including those from China and Vietnam where the demand is greatest, did not speak at the opening of the meeting.

Interpol, the international intelligence agency, which will also be present at the meeting, says most of this being driven by organised crime syndicates, who have moved from narcotics and guns onto wildlife.

At a symposium held at the Zoological Society of London on Tuesday and Wednesday, conservationists said the problem needed to be tackled on several different fronts.

They said improved legislation was needed, rangers needed support on the ground and the growing demand had to be tackled with education and marketing campaigns.

Heather Sohl, chief adviser on species for WWF-UK, said: "What we really want to see is these world leaders coming together and agreeing strong action for tackling illegal wildlife trafficking, looking at improving law enforcement and criminal justice, reducing the demand for illegal wildlife products, and ensuring sustainable livelihood's for communities affected by the trade.

"We need to have strong action and for those people to take that home to their governments and make sure it is implemented at a scale and urgency that is commensurate for the problems we are seeing."