

### Elephant Poaching and the Ivory Trade

This fact sheet aims to brief policy-makers on the link between elephant poaching and the ivory trade. Proposals to relax the African elephant's internationally protected status and to increase one-off sales of stockpiled ivory spell doom to Africa's elephants within our lifetimes.

#### Background

1. In 1979 there were an estimated 1.3 million African elephants. By 1989 only 600,000 remained.
2. The loss of more than half a million elephants in a decade was due primarily to killing for ivory. Natural habitat loss was a second important factor: human population had doubled in elephant range states since 1970.
3. Major public awareness campaigns were launched worldwide to save the elephant and halt the illegal trade in ivory.
4. In October 1989, at the seventh meeting of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) Convention of the Parties (CoP7), governments banned international trade in ivory, with effect from January 1990.
5. Some Parties to the convention (France, UK, USA) had already begun to impose their own ivory import bans.
6. Demand for ivory dried up; the price of ivory dropped significantly and rapidly from ca. \$300 per kilogramme to ca. \$3 per kg.
7. Elephants in many parts of Africa were left in peace, and populations recovered. For example, Kenya had lost 90% of its elephants (167,000 to 16,000) in the 16-year period from 1973 to 1989. The population has grown back to more than 30,000 today.
8. In some areas poaching continued at a lower level, particularly in Central and West Africa where there were local markets for ivory. In addition, some ivory was smuggled out of Africa, mostly to the Far East.
9. In 1997 at CoP10, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe succeeded in having their elephant populations downlisted by CITES to a less endangered status (see KEF Fact Sheet 03 on *CITES and the Ivory Trade*).
10. In April 1998, Taiwanese port police seized 190 tusks and 283 ivory pieces weighing 1.45 tonnes originating from Nigeria.
11. The three southern African countries were allowed to sell stockpiled ivory to CITES-designated buyers. The first sale was in 1999; 50 tonnes were exported to Japan.
12. In 2000 at CoP11, South Africa's elephant population was downlisted.
13. In June, 2002, the largest shipment of illegal ivory since the 1989 ban was seized by Singapore authorities. DNA analysis showed the ivory had originated in Zambia. The shipment, via Malawi and Zimbabwe, was destined for Japan. It comprised 532 elephant tusks and more than 40,000 cut pieces of ivory, 6.5 tonnes in total.
14. In November 2002 at CoP12, it was agreed that Botswana, Namibia and South Africa could export 60 tonnes of ivory, subject to conditions.
15. This second CITES-negotiated sale occurred in 2008. Zimbabwe was also allowed to sell ivory. 108 tonnes went to Japan and China (46 and 62, respectively). Many predicted the sale might fuel an increasing appetite for ivory among the rapidly growing Chinese middle classes. That prediction appears to have been correct (see below, paras 20, 21).

#### Present Situation

16. Some 470,000 elephants remain in Africa today according to IUCN's African Elephant Specialist Group. Other authorities estimate the number to be considerably lower.
17. An estimated 38,000 elephants are killed annually to supply the ivory trade, according to Dr. S. Wasser's genetic studies of confiscated ivory (see para. 13). If this rate were to continue, elephants could be gone from most of their former range in less than 15 years.

18. Killing of elephants is increasing in East, Central and West Africa, as evidenced by increased poaching and increased seizures of ivory originating in Africa.
19. Confiscations of illegal ivory have greatly increased. ETIS, the Elephant Trade Information System has shown "... that between 2007 (the last time data was collected) and 2009, over 2,000 seizures of illegal elephant material were recorded by authorities, a sharp increase from years past. The increased rate of poaching, coupled with the large quantities of ivory in individual seizures, suggests that criminal networks are behind the trade and manipulating local populations to increase their profits." (MediaGlobal, 21-11-09)
20. Demand in China has escalated since the one-off sales. Ivory carving factories and sales of ivory items have increased. In 2009 an additional 37 stores were approved as new, official ivory retail outlets. If only a small percentage of the 1.3 billion Chinese purchase ivory, the effect on elephant populations will be devastating.
21. Chinese companies are working throughout Africa. E. B. Martin, a leading ivory trade expert, said: "Chinese [throughout] Africa ... are buying up ivory, worked and raw. ... in Khartoum or Omdurman I found that about 75% of all ivory being sold was bought by Chinese." (Daily Nation, 11-11-09)
22. A kilogramme of ivory sells for as much as \$1,500 in the Far East. On the ground in Kenya it sells for 3,000 Kenya shillings (\$40). Even a small pair of 10-kg tusks would bring a poacher the equivalent of \$400, more than casual workers earn in a year. A big bull carrying 100 kg of ivory would bring a fortune. The incentive is considerable.

### **What Can be Done to Save Elephants**

23. National government Parties to CITES should aim for a permanent ban on the sale of ivory both internationally and within nations. In the interim, as the debate continues and more data are gathered, a 20-year ivory trade moratorium could be put in place (see KEF Fact Sheets 03 *CITES and the Ivory Trade*; 04 *Proposals on the African Elephant for CITES CoP15*).
24. Given the evidence that the stockpile sales to Japan and China have fuelled demand for ivory (see paragraphs 20 and 21), no further stockpile sales should be sanctioned.
25. The specific proposals of two southern African countries, Zambia and Tanzania, seeking the resumption of trade in African elephant ivory should be rejected (see KEF Fact Sheet 04 on *Proposals on the African Elephant for CITES CoP15*).
26. Public awareness campaigns should be mounted to reduce demand. As with the drug trade, if there are consumers willing to pay distorted prices for products, poachers and smugglers will find a way to get the product to the buyers.
27. Public awareness campaigns should be mounted to increase sensitivity to the ethical issues of killing a highly-intelligent, social-networking, communicative and self-aware animal like the elephant (similar in many ways to cetaceans and great apes) for consumptive, profit-driven use (see KEF Fact Sheet 05 on *Elephants and Ecosystems*).
28. Range states should be encouraged to develop and then trade on reputations of being ethical destinations for ecologically sensitive tourism.
29. The African Elephant Coalition, a new partnership of some two dozen African elephant range states, should be supported in its aim to promote and sustain a united front for the long-term conservation of Africa's elephants and their habitats (see KEF Fact Sheet 01).
30. There should be critical examination of the argument that ivory sales can be used effectively to support elephant conservation. Economically, the amounts generated are insignificant compared to funds needed for effective national conservation programmes; morally, the notion is akin to selling drugs to support anti-drug campaigns. (See KEF Fact Sheet 05 on *Elephants and Ecosystems*).
31. The Kenya Elephant Forum, in support of the African Elephant Coalition, will mount Internet petition campaigns to enable concerned individuals to lobby against the killing of elephants.

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