



MEDIA RELEASE

Investigation by the Wildlife Justice Commission reveals the displacement of ivory trafficking within Southeast Asia

International cooperation is needed to drive an intelligence-led law enforcement approach to deter the trafficking of ivory across the region, says the organisation

The Hague, the Netherlands, 11 June 2020

A year-long investigation by the Wildlife Justice Commission into the trafficking of ivory has revealed that criminal networks are moving away from countries with strengthened law enforcement capacity, such as China and Vietnam, into more vulnerable, less resourced ones, like Cambodia.

The results of the investigation have been published in a report issued today that highlights the need for international law enforcement cooperation to effectively address and deter the persistent trafficking of ivory across the Greater Mekong Subregion.

The report [*The Growing Relevance of Cambodia in the Global Ivory Trade*](#) exposes the findings of Operation Jeopardy, which commenced in May 2019 and has evidenced that Cambodia is becoming a significant hub for ivory carving and manufacturing targeting a Chinese clientele. During the investigation, the Wildlife Justice Commission documented the impact that China's domestic ivory trade ban and further enforcement efforts have had in the region, with prices and demand for raw ivory declining and criminal syndicates switching to processed ivory, which is easier to transport.

"Increased law enforcement action by China and neighbouring countries such as Vietnam and Lao PDR has resulted in a visible reduction of the open sale of ivory," says Sarah Stoner, Director of Intelligence at the Wildlife Justice Commission. "Inevitably, crime has gone underground and is resurfacing in countries with less law enforcement capacity to tackle wildlife crime, such as Cambodia."

Wildlife Justice Commission's operatives obtained evidence of the illegal production and open sale of ivory in Cambodia at the start of Operation Jeopardy in May 2019, and during follow-up missions and undercover interactions through to May 2020. Operatives identified several larger retail premises in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville, operated by Chinese traffickers targeting a Chinese clientele and offering carved ivory and other wildlife products. A factory using a wood manufacturing business as a cover was found to be mass producing carved ivory jewellery using computer-operated machinery. These traffickers also offered a range of other wildlife products, including tiger parts. A visit to the factory in March 2020 confirmed that it was still fully operational, despite a large downturn in the number of Chinese tourists due to travel restrictions already in place to curb COVID-19.

The Wildlife Justice Commission forwarded an intelligence report to the local NGO, Wildlife Alliance, who in turn informed the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (1), who raided the premises (2), arresting seven Chinese nationals and seizing wildlife products, including ivory, tiger bones, pangolin scales and dried seahorses. One Chinese national was later charged with wildlife offences.





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As recently as May 2020, Wildlife Justice Commission’s investigators have received offers of wildlife products from traffickers, including raw ivory tusks priced at USD 1,600 per kg, showing the continuation of this criminality despite the raid.

“It is now most urgent to strengthen international cooperation to establish well-coordinated and intelligence-led law enforcement approaches to address ivory trafficking regionally, especially to support those countries that currently lack the capacity and resources to challenge transnational wildlife crime in their territories,” concludes Stoner.

The [Wildlife Justice Commission](#) operates globally to disrupt and help dismantle organised transnational criminal networks trading in wildlife, timber and fish. We do this by collecting evidence and turning it into accountability.

Notes for editor:

- (1) About the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team: <https://www.wildlifealliance.org/wildlife-police/>
- (2) Further information about the raid of the ivory carving factory in Phnom Penh <https://www.wildlifealliance.org/ivory-and-pangolins-the-dark-underbelly-of-cambodias-wildlife-trade/>

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