

Media statement

Thursday, August 26, 2010

CHINESE JAILED AS MORE ILLEGAL IVORY SEIZED IN KENYA

A Chinese national was yesterday jailed for 18 months for possession of illegal ivory barely a day after the weekend seizure of 2 tonnes of ivory and five rhino horns.

This was part of two more seizures of illegal ivory from Mozambique and Uganda made at Kenya's main airport in Nairobi in a week.

On Monday August 23, 2010 an unaccompanied cargo of two pieces of carved and raw ivory weighing 3.3 kg from Kampala, Uganda destined for Hong Kong, China was intercepted at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport.

The following day, Tuesday August 24, 2010 the Chinese national on Kenya Airways flight was seized with a hand luggage containing 10 illegal worked ivory chopping sticks and two bangles. He has since been charged in Nairobi's Makadara Law Courts where he pleaded guilty of possession of wildlife trophy without a valid permit and for failure to report to Kenya Wildlife. He was jailed 18 months jail without

the option of a fine for the first count and fined Sh10,000 or 12 months imprisonment for the second count.

Kenya Wildlife Service and regional wildlife group Lusaka Agreement Task Force are in the process of contacting the Uganda Wildlife Authorities to help with investigation on the source of the contraband and how it slipped through the Entebbe Airport unnoticed.

One of the suspects in the seizure of 317 pieces of raw elephant ivory weighing 2 tonnes and five rhino horns at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) was charged in in the same Nairobi court on Tuesday. He denied the charges of failing to report illegal government trophies and was granted cash bail of Sh300,000 or bond of Sh500,000 and sureties in the same amount.

The main owner of the consignment is till on the run.

Investigators are following up on the vehicle that transported the contraband and its driver and other occupants.

The second suspect, who was an employee of a freight company, was released after interrogation.

Investigations are continuing over the source and sender and recipient of the illegal cargo, which had been disguised as only avocado fruits.

Most of the tusks seem to have been collected from natural deaths of about 150 elephants over the last 20 years with the latest likely to be six months old. None of the tusks had the indelible ink used for marking government held stocks. DNA tests will be conducted to determine the tusks actual origin. The seizure and arrests was a joint operation involving the Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Revenue Authority, Lusaka Agreement Task Force, the Kenya Police and the Trans-global Warehouse security personnel.

On August 21, 2010 at around 9pm, Trans-global warehouse security contacted the KWS JKIA Canine Unit about a suspicious cargo for export destined for Malaysia through Dubai by Emirates airline.

The cargo which was falsely declared as containing only fresh avocado fruits was packed in 12 wooden boxes which raised a red flag due to its mode of package, weight and destination. The contraband was packed amongst avocado fruits wrapped in black polythene papers and banana leaves in the wooden

boxes. This packaging was intended to disguise the true content of the cargo to evade security detection.

In the recent times, cases of illegal trafficking of wildlife products through Kenya's ports to the middle and Far East destinations has been a matter of concern. This year, wildlife contraband which has been exported to these destinations has been intercepted in Thailand, Vietnam and Hong Kong (China).

The seizure is so far the largest elephant ivory recovery in Kenya in the recent past which has caused great concern to law enforcers and conservationists. Kenya continues to experience increased elephant and rhino poaching.

According to our records, in 2007, the number of illegally killed elephants stood at 47, in 2008 at 94 while in 2009 they stood at 204, representing sharp increase in poaching. On the other hand, rhino poaching numbers in 2008 stood at five compared to 13 in 2009. Kenya loses about 200-300 elephants every year to natural causes.

In response to this increased poaching and illegal trafficking in trophies, KWS has started implementing wide-ranging reforms in force modernisation, including creating various

specialised law enforcement units to curb wildlife-related crime. It is also in the process of enhancing its law enforcement capacity through up-skilling law enforcement staff, the acquisition of ivory detectors, and other specialised security equipment to counter wildlife crimes more efficiently. We are also strengthening linkages with other law enforcement agencies.

KWS would like to call for the fast tracking of the passing of the new wildlife policy and law to provide for more deterrent sentences, inter-agency collaboration to fight the crime. We also appeal for public support for information on wildlife-related crime.

Any elephant anywhere is important because once poachers are through with the vulnerable populations, they will come for Kenya's better protected. Most poachers prefer South Africa (Oliver Tambo), Kenya (Jomo Kenyatta) or Ethiopia (Addis Ababa) because of ease of reaching the Far East where the demand for ivory remains high. Elephants irrespective of origin is the property of the world and Kenya will play its part as a CITES signatory.

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Background

In 1979 there were estimated to be 1.3 million elephants in Africa but by 1989 only 600,000 remained. This catastrophic loss was almost entirely due to the killing of elephants for their ivory. Currently, approximately 400,000 remain in Africa today.

CITES banned the international commercial ivory trade in 1989 after elephant populations dropped dramatically across the world due to widespread poaching.

In October 1989, through CITES, a ban on all international trade in ivory was passed. The CITES ban went into effect in January 1990.

Demand for ivory later dried up and the price of ivory dropped from about US\$300 per kilo to about US\$3 per kilo. But in 1997 and 2002 it permitted Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe to sell limited stocks of ivory to Japan, in recognition of the fact that some southern African elephant populations were healthy and well managed.

Five years later at a CITES meeting at The Hague further sales of stockpiled ivory were permitted in return for a nine-year moratorium on further sales.

Elephants in many parts of Africa were left in peace and their populations were able to recover. As an example, Kenya lost over 85 per cent of its elephants in a 15 year period, going from 153,000 to 19,000. In the years after the ban the population grew to over 35,000.

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