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Great progress on tackling wildlife crime in Vietnam illuminates challenges ahead

TEN critical actions that Vietnam can take now to stop the illegal trafficking and trade of endangered wildlife

Vietnam has made significant progress in combating the illegal wildlife trade over the past ten years. Substantial efforts have been made in strengthening wildlife protection laws including closing loopholes, increasing fines and punishment, and strengthening legal protection overall for the country's most critically endangered species. Likewise, the responsiveness and capacity of enforcement agencies has improved remarkably when compared to that in the early 2000s. There is greater transparency and accountability in enforcement efforts overall. Consumer wildlife crime has been reduced in major cities by nearly a third based on ENV monitoring in six cities, the number of illegal captive bears on bear farms has decreased by almost 70%. Public reporting of wildlife crime has more than doubled in the past three years alone, based on reporting to ENV's Wildlife Crime Hotline **1800-1522**. Customs and police at our ports and borders have succeeded in interdicting major shipments of ivory, pangolin scales, while law enforcement agencies in our interior have conducted countless raids and arrests in other high profile trafficking cases.



Destroying 2.1 tonnes is a good start, but Vietnam should make destruction routine following confiscations.

"We should be proud of how much progress has been made in a mere decade," said Ms. Bui Thi Ha, ENV's Vice director. "However, despite these gains, major obstacles lie ahead that challenge us collectively if we are to successfully secure the future of species like tigers, rhinos, pangolins, and other endangered wildlife."

ENV has identified TEN important interventions that we as a country should take that can profoundly and positively impact the future of our endangered wildlife. Although these interventions may not be obtainable overnight, we must commit ourselves to overcoming these challenges and move forward.

1. Take down the leaders of criminal networks: Aggressively pursue and prosecute the leadership of known criminal networks involved in the trafficking of rhino horn, tigers, ivory, marine turtles, and other endangered wildlife. Actively follow through with the Prime Minister's instruction of No. 28/CT-TTg of September 12, 2016 calling upon relevant agencies to pursue "kingpins" and aggressively dismantle major criminal networks.

A review of prosecutions for major cases from 2010 - 2016 shows that not a single senior figure in a major criminal network has been arrested or prosecuted over the past six years. Moreover, in one particular case where a senior figure in the marine turtle trade network was caught with ten tons of marine turtles in his possession, the investigation failed to reveal his role, nor his network, and today, two years later, he is yet to be prosecuted for his alleged crimes.

2. Establish an effective deterrence: Utilize existing laws and the courts to effectively deter wildlife crime. Ensure that convicted criminals do not receive light sentences and that punishment is effective in deterring further criminal behavior both for the subject and other would-be criminals. Both the current and revised penal code allows the courts to issue substantial prison sentences and fines.

However, a review of criminal prosecutions for serious wildlife crimes over the past six years shows that most convicted criminals received suspended sentences or probation, which only further bolsters the idea that wildlife crime is a safe form of profitable criminal activity that is not taken seriously by the courts, and thus a low risk investment.

3. Ban rhino horn trade in any form: Permanently ban any form of trade of rhino horns, including the trade in trophies, to reduce and eliminate Vietnam's role as both consumer and transit state in the present rhino poaching crisis.

4. Destroy all stockpiles of confiscated ivory and rhino horn: The recent destruction of 2.1 tonnes of ivory is a good start. However, Vietnam should make destruction of ivory AND rhino horn a routine outcome following the conclusion of cases involving confiscations. Small samples of confiscated ivory and rhino horn should only be maintained by state authorities for the purpose of DNA analysis and mapping, education and training, and scientific research.

ENV urges authorities to destroy all of the estimated 44 plus tons of confiscated ivory and hundreds of kilograms of rhino horn currently held by functional agencies.

5. Close tiger farms and stop uncontrolled breeding of tigers at zoos and rescue centers: Close private tiger farms and prohibit further breeding of tigers at zoos and other establishments where breeding serves no purpose or value to conservation, education, or scientific research.

Since 2007, captive tiger populations have increased from 55 to more than 189 on private farms and at zoos as a result of uncontrolled breeding that has no value to conservation of the species. Some of the 14 private establishments have been engaged in both the selling and laundering of tiger cubs into the illegal wildlife trade. A convicted tiger trader was recently issued a license by provincial authorities to keep tigers. Arresting the development of tiger farms is critical to address illegal trade of tigers and prevent another crisis similar to the 2005 bear farm crisis during which local authorities permitted thousands of illegally sourced bears to accumulate on farms.

Vietnam should follow the commitment of the Lao Government during the September 2016 CITES Conference of Parties to close down tiger farms in the Laos PDR.

6. Finish the job: end bear farming in Vietnam: After more than ten years of progress, the number of bears on farms has decreased from 4,300 in 2005 to about 1,200 animals today. Bear bile consumption in Vietnam has dropped by about 61% since 2010. It is time to bring an end to this industry that started with thousands of bears being caught in the wild and illegally kept on farms. Given that all of these bears were

not of legal origin and therefore acquired in violation of criminal law, bear farm owners should be encouraged to voluntarily transfer their bears without compensation or face punishment.

7. Freeze licensing of commercial wildlife farms nationwide: Prohibit further licensing of commercial wildlife farms throughout Vietnam until such time that an effective management system is in place and authorities have the capacity to effectively monitor and manage farms, and prevent large scale laundering of wild caught animals through these farms.

Actively enforce regulations over existing commercial wildlife farming operations including (1) withdrawing the license from any commercial wildlife enterprise where owners are unable to provide proof of legal origin for animals they possess or sell from their farm, (2) prosecution of farm owners where criminal activity is detected and (3) termination and punishment of local authorities that collude, falsify, or engage in any form of corrupt practices in association with management and oversight of commercial farming operations.

Permanently ban any form of commercial farming of tigers, bears, and any other species listed as fully protected under Vietnamese law. Restrict permits for possession of these species to legitimate and licensed zoos, conservation and rescue centers, and scientific institutions that are not engaged in any form of commercial trade in wildlife or wildlife products.

8. Hold local authorities responsible for eradicating consumer wildlife crime in their jurisdictions: Issue clear instructions to People's Committees at the commune, district, and municipal levels to engage in efforts supported by subordinate functional agencies to effectively eradicate consumer wildlife crime in their jurisdictions, including addressing advertising, selling, and possession of wildlife in violation of the law.

Local government can be most effective if they are held accountable for ensuring that businesses within their respective communities are in compliance with the law.

9. Pull the plug on internet crime: Utilize existing laws to address and eliminate the growing use of the internet to advertise and sell endangered wildlife in Vietnam through active measures to shut down websites that support the advertising and sale of protected species, and develop a mechanism to pursue and shut down social media channels of individuals that advertise wildlife on Facebook or other social media.

10. Amplify the voice of government: Amplify the voice of government at all levels in efforts to raise awareness amongst the public and reduce consumer demand for wildlife. While non-government organizations are a critical part of awareness-raising efforts, government partners could play a much more active role in contributing to the reduction of consumer demand through government communication channels and access to public media. .

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About ENV

Education for Nature – Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam's first non-governmental organization focused on the conservation of nature and the protection of the environment. ENV combats the illegal wildlife trade and aims to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about

the need to protect nature and wildlife. ENV employs creative and innovative strategies to influence public attitudes and reduce demand for wildlife trade products. ENV works closely with government partners to strengthen policy and legislation, and directly supports enforcement efforts in the protection of endangered species of regional, national, and global significance.

Since 2007, ENV has focused its activities on three major program areas that comprise ENV's integrated strategic approach for addressing illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam. These include:

- Reducing consumer demand for wildlife products through investment in a long-term and sustained effort to influence public attitudes and behavior
- Strengthening enforcement through direct support and assistance to law enforcement agencies, and mobilizing active public participation in helping combat wildlife crime
- Working with policy-makers to strengthen legislation, close loopholes in the law, and promote sound policy and decision-making relevant to wildlife protection.