

Rhino horn trafficking kingpin in Vietnam sentenced to 13 months in prison

HANOI - Nguyen Mau Chien, who is suspected of leading a criminal network operating from Africa that smuggles rhino horn, ivory, and other endangered wildlife into Vietnam, was sentenced to 13 months in prison on March 20, 2018 by a Ha Dong court. Three accomplices involved in the April 2017 crime trafficking case, two of Chien's nephews and his wife, walked free after the trial.

Following the trial at Ha Dong District Court, Nguyen Mau Chien was officially convicted on charges of transporting and possessing illegal goods.

The landmark prosecution also raises serious questions as to whether 13 months in jail is a sufficient punishment for the alleged kingpin of a major criminal network that is linked to the trafficking and killing of hundreds of elephants and rhinos in Africa.

Speaking at the conclusion of the trial, Bui Thi Ha, Director of Policy and Legislation at ENV said: "The case against Nguyen Mau Chien was a major breakthrough for Vietnam, where no major wildlife traffickers have been prosecuted previously." Ha went on to say, "We had high hopes for a sentence which would both appropriately punish Chien for his crimes against nature, and also help act as a deterrent to others."

However Ha expressed her disappointment in the outcome. "The relatively light sentence fails to reflect the seriousness of Chien's offence. We will continue to work with relevant authorities to appeal the verdict. It is critical that our efforts to stamp out wildlife trafficking networks are effective and lasting. To achieve this, there must be sufficient punishment to deter criminal behavior, prevent resurgence, and to send a clear message to the world that trafficking of wildlife will not be tolerated in today's Vietnam."

ENV is calling on the authorities to investigate further to prove that this seizure of rhino horn last year was more than merely an opportunistic offence, but rather, part of an ongoing organized criminal network controlled by Nguyen Mau Chien and his associates.

ENV is further urging the authorities in Thanh Hoa province to shut down Chien's tiger farm and confiscate the tigers there, all of which were obtained illegally years ago. Chien's tiger farm has been in legal limbo since last July when it was ruled that there was no legal basis to close the tiger farm until the outcome of the trial was decided, and until completion of DNA testing of two dead tiger cubs' found at Chien's home show that that the cubs originated from his farm.

On January 1, 2018, the 2015 Penal Code (amended 2017) came into force which increased the maximum prison sentence for illegal wildlife trafficking from seven years to fifteen years. ENV hopes that the new Penal Code combined with increased focus on investigations of major criminal networks will lead to the prosecution of other major offenders like Chien, who have made fortunes slaughtering endangered species like rhinos and elephants, tarnishing the image of Vietnam.



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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.