

## **Hanoi Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade:**

### **Remarks for John C. Cruden**

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- I am John Cruden, the Assistant Attorney General for the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice.
- I am honored to represent the United States here today, along with my colleagues from the United States Department of State, Department of the Interior, and USAID.
- It is a privilege to join you to discuss the work we are all doing to combat the global crisis posed by international wildlife trafficking.
- Wildlife trafficking threatens the very survival of a vast array of species throughout the world—including iconic species such as elephants, rhinos, and tigers, and lesser-known species such as pangolins, turtles, and parrots. It has grave impacts on the communities who rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. Wildlife trafficking generates billions of dollars in illicit revenues—contributing to the illegal economy, fueling corruption, and undermining the rule of law and national security.
- U.S. efforts have been guided by President Obama’s recognition that a new approach was required to counter the scourge of wildlife trafficking: a whole-of-government approach.
- In July 2013, while in Africa, President Obama announced the creation of a U.S. Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking, bringing together 17 federal departments and agencies to create and implement a common National Strategy to combat poaching and trafficking.
- Our National Strategy was issued the same month that this group first met in London in 2014. I am pleased to report that since then—while the global

community has moved forward together to implement the commitments we made in London and last year in Kasane—the United States has worked vigorously to turn the goals in our Strategy into concrete steps and action.

- For example, in July, we followed through on President Obama’s commitment to close our domestic ivory market by issuing a strong new rule that imposes a near-total ban on the import, export, and domestic commercial trade in elephant ivory.
- Further bolstering our domestic and overseas anti-trafficking efforts, in the last two months, a bipartisan U.S. Congress passed, and President Obama signed, the Eliminate, Neutralize, and Disrupt—or E.N.D.—Wildlife Trafficking Act to give us additional tools to combat wildlife trafficking.
- The United States recognizes that we, like all nations engaged in this fight, must have strong and effective criminal enforcement to stop those who kill and traffic in protected species.
- We have had great successes with multi-agency enforcement efforts like Operation Crash (focused on rhino horn trade) and on operations that target trade in swim bladders from totoaba fish that threaten the survival of a critically endangered porpoise—the vaquita—taken as bycatch.
- In these operations, U.S. enforcement agents and prosecutors target high-level wildlife traffickers and seek to use all available tools to take the profit out of wildlife crime. We have obtained significant jail sentences and forced defendants to forfeit many millions of dollars obtained from their trafficking activities in the form of cash, wildlife products such as rhino horn and ivory, and luxury goods and vehicles obtained with the profits.
- We are strongly committed to supporting our foreign partners in this fight.
  - Last year, the U.S. provided training to more than 2,000 enforcement officials—including rangers, police, customs officials, prosecutors, and judges—in more than 40 countries.
  - For example, working with the Asian Development Bank, we reviewed the authority and capability of Southeast Asia countries like Vietnam and Myanmar to effectively combat wildlife trafficking.

- We conducted a series of regional capacity building workshops in both southern and western Africa for judges and prosecutors.
- And we have conducted capacity-building workshops in Africa to train partner nations' civilian and military enforcement agencies in various skills, such as small-unit tactics, countering public corruption, basic criminal investigations, and border patrol.
- We will continue to invest in such training and capacity-building efforts. We will work with UNODC to support use of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC)'s *Wildlife and Forestry Analytic Toolkit*; provide training, with Interpol and other partners, to strengthen effective participation in cross-border enforcement; and work with governments to close loopholes and strengthen penalties for wildlife crimes.
- Of course, anti-trafficking enforcement efforts must be complemented by efforts to curtail the persistent market demand that drives this trade.
- We have held several ivory destructions, highlighting the need to curb demand.
- U.S. embassies throughout the world are bringing together governments, NGOs, students, and celebrities for visits and exchanges focused on educating the public and thus reducing demand.
- Here in Vietnam, for example, we partnered with the governments of Vietnam and South Africa, in coordination with civil society, to launch Operation Game Change on World Wildlife Day. This campaign to reduce demand for rhino horn included multiple outreach events, such as a film and concert festival called Wildfest that attracted 2,500 people.
- Within the framework of the National Strategy, we are also working across the U.S. government to focus our international investments to combat wildlife trafficking in the most strategic and effective way possible.
- In Fiscal Year 2015 alone, the United States invested more than \$90 million to support international programs aimed at stopping wildlife trafficking. We anticipate investing similar amounts this year.

- This investment has supported a number of important efforts, including:
  - USFWS has stationed special agent attachés around the globe, including Thailand, Peru, Tanzania, Botswana, and China, and will place additional agents in other strategic locations as well.
  - Our ROUTES program, a multi-agency partnership in collaboration with NGOs and the private sector, focuses on preventing illegal wildlife products from entering legal transportation supply chains.
  - USAID’s Wildlife Crime Tech Challenge received more than 300 applications from 52 countries, and awarded over \$1 million to 16 prize-winning projects and 4 grand-prize winners, showcasing outstanding ideas to improve forensic evidence, detect transit routes, and tackle corruption.
  - Just last month, we held our first Zoonhackathon at zoos and conservation centers across the globe, seeking new applications and tools to address the demand side of wildlife trafficking.
  - And in 2015, we joined Vietnam in co-hosting the First Meeting of the Pangolin Range States, at which African and Asian range countries developed a unified action plan to protect pangolins.
- In terms of future commitments, USAID is implementing “Wildlife Asia,” a \$23 million Southeast Asia regional program designed to reduce demand and expand ASEAN cooperation on wildlife trafficking.
- The United States is also announcing the “Saving Species” initiative, a \$9 million USAID program under the U.S.-Vietnam Partnership to Combat Wildlife Trafficking that aims to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products, build wildlife law enforcement and prosecution capacity, and harmonize the legal framework for combating wildlife crime in Vietnam.
- Over the past year the United States has also maintained our commitment to raise this issue at the highest levels of our diplomatic engagement.

- In September, we saw many important decisions adopted at the IUCN quadrennial World Conservation Congress, including recommendations for steps that would help combat wildlife trafficking.
- The Congress set the stage for the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (or CITES), one of the most successful CITES meetings ever. We applaud the efforts of countries around this table for these successes.
  - We were pleased by adoption of a US proposal to recommend that all CITES parties with domestic markets that contribute to poaching or illegal ivory trade close those markets as a matter of urgency.
  - For the first time ever, the Parties adopted resolutions aimed at demand reduction and at combating corruption.
  - The parties also provided new or increased protection for several highly trafficked species, such as all pangolin species—now the most trafficked mammal in the world—as well as all species of rosewood; silky and thresher sharks; pygmy chameleons; and grey parrots.
- And on the sidelines of the CITES COP, the Second Global Meeting of Wildlife Enforcement Networks (WENs) was held to bring together enforcement officials and prosecutors from member countries to enhance global and regional cooperation. We look forward to working with ICCWC to strengthen the WENs and build the global network fostering greater communication and collaboration among all regional enforcement entities.
- I am proud of the U.S.'s deep commitment to combating wildlife trafficking and excited by what has been accomplished thus far but know that much more will be needed to solve this tragic problem.
- Wildlife trafficking is a global crisis that requires global solutions. Increased international cooperation and collaboration are critical. Ending the illegal trade in wildlife will require a significant and sustained effort from all nations.

Thank you.