



Congo seizes US\$3.5 mln of ivory

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Authorities in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have seized US\$3.5 million worth of ivory, rhinoceros' horn and pangolin scales in a joint operation with United States officials, the US embassy in Kinshasa said on Monday.

Two wildlife traffickers were also arrested in the United States on Nov. 4, following a more than two-year investigation between the two countries and global police agency Interpol.

Congolese law enforcement recovered almost a ton of ivory and 34 kg of pangolin scales in several locations in the capital Kinshasa, the US embassy said in a statement.

Congolese officials expect to seize upwards of 60 tons of ivory in further operations, said Olivier Mushiete, the head of Congo's Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN).

"We are putting down an international network of traffickers that are mainly from Congo," Mushiete told Reuters by telephone. "We have already reached up to 20 tons in total. It's not over yet. There will be more operations in the coming days."

Corruption, poor law enforcement and armed conflict have left West and Central Africa vulnerable to international criminals and made the region a hotbed of ivory and pangolin scale trafficking to Asia in recent years.

Congo seized 20.9 tons of ivory from 2015 to 2019, up from only 7.8 tons over the previous 16 years, according to statistics collected by the Environmental Investigation Agency.

"Illicit wildlife trafficking... robs the DRC of its natural treasures and also serves to finance armed groups and terrorists," said Mike Hammer, US ambassador in Kinshasa. -Nampa/Reuters