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Gabon: Four suspected ivory traffickers arrested in Makokou

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Four individuals involved in the illegal trafficking of four ivory tips were arrested on April 5 and 6, 2023 in Makokou, a town in northeastern Gabon. The elephant population in Gabon remains threatened despite regular ivory seizures by Water and Forestry agents. This observation has led civil society to explore actions upstream of the ivory trade process.

In Gabon, efforts to fight crime related to protected wildlife species have just resulted in new arrests. A joint team of agents from the Water and Forestry Administration and the Judicial Police in the province of Ogooué-Ivindo in northeastern Gabon has just dismantled an ivory trafficking circuit operating in the town of Makokou.

A total of four individuals involved in the commercialization of ivory were arrested on April 5 and 6, 2023. The first was arrested with four ivory tips, two of which were whole and two cut into pieces. Overwhelmed by this arrest, he revealed the details of this case. He confirmed that he was the owner of part of the ivory found in his possession. The driver was also arrested at the same time. On April 6, the owner of the severed ivories and another intermediary were arrested in turn.

Arrested with the technical assistance of Conservation Justice, all of these suspects are being prosecuted for possession, attempted commercialization, as well as complicity in possession and complicity in attempted commercialization of ivory tips. Articles 390 and 392 of the new Gabonese penal code provide for a prison sentence of up to 10 years and a fine equivalent to five times the market value of the ivory spikes found in their possession. It should be noted that a pair of ivory tips can easily be traded for 22,500 euros, according to estimates by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

Reducing the Demand for Ivory in China

Gabon's elephant population remains threatened despite regular ivory seizures by Water and Forestry officials. Since 2010, Conservation Justice has helped seize 754 elephant tusks, totaling over 3.5 tons of ivory. According to Gaspard Abitsi, executive director of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in Gabon, this trafficking is mainly aimed at international markets. The new measures adopted in recent years at the international level are aimed precisely at curbing this demand. "In recent years, many efforts have been made, including in the United States of America in 2016 with the measures that were taken to ban domestic ivory markets, and in China, which also took steps to ban these official state markets in 2018. All of these decisions are helping to reduce demand. Because for poaching to occur, there has to be a market, and that market is often driven by demand. Naturally, countries like Gabon, which are home to forest elephant species, are the supply side," he said.

In Gabon, the legislator has strengthened the legal framework in 2019 by increasing the maximum penalty from 6 months in prison to up to 10 years

in prison. This measure is intended to deter those tempted to engage in this traffic.



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