

IVORY TRAFFICKING: Historic Trial Opens in Libreville

On May 31, 2024, the Special Court of Libreville will open a correctional hearing to try several individuals involved in an international ivory trafficking network connecting Gabon, Cameroon, and Nigeria. This complex case highlights the challenges of fighting poaching in Central Africa.



The international ivory trafficking case that has shaken several Central African countries will reach a decisive turning point with the opening of a correctional hearing at the Special Court of Libreville on May 31, 2024. Ten months ago, major arrests were made in Lambaréné and Makokou, orchestrated by the Provincial Judicial Police, the Provincial Directions of Water and Forests, and the Anti-Poaching Directorate, with support from the NGO Conservation Justice.

The Main Accused

Among those arrested are Ngangni Ibrahim Gaël, Evouna Guy Bertrand, and Tonga Assouman, along with seven other alleged accomplices. These individuals are suspected of being key members of a sophisticated ivory trafficking network operating between Gabon, Cameroon, and Nigeria. The case took an international turn with the arrest of Mohamadou Ibrahim in Nigeria in February 2024, identified as the mastermind of this network.

Mohamadou Ibrahim, previously convicted in Cameroon in 2020 for possession of 600 kilograms of ivory, had been released after only four months in prison. In August 2023, the arrests in Lambaréné and Makokou revealed the extent of the network: 21 elephant tusks and 4 pieces of ivory, totaling 131

kilograms, were seized along with ammunition. Mohamadou Ibrahim was arrested in Mfum, Nigeria, with 52 elephant tusks weighing nearly 200 kilograms, a pistol, and live ammunition.

Gabonese authorities discovered that this network used modified vehicles with secret compartments to transport the ivory. The regions of Moyen-Ogooué, Ogooué-Ivindo, Nyanga, Ngounié, Haut-Ogooué, Woleu-Ntem, and Estuaire were particularly affected by these illegal activities.

The accused face a potential prison sentence of up to 10 years under Articles 390 and 396 of the Gabonese Penal Code. The severity of the charges, supported by evidence of participation in an organized gang, could double these sentences.

International Challenges

Mohamadou Ibrahim's arrest in Nigeria highlights the challenges of cross-border cooperation in the fight against ivory trafficking. It is hoped that Nigerian authorities will be stricter in their sentences to deter future offenses.

This trial in Libreville could mark a turning point in the fight against ivory trafficking in Central Africa. Gabonese justice, along with that of Cameroon and Nigeria, is called upon to take decisive measures to stop this illegal trade and protect elephants threatened by poaching.

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