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Environmental Crime is World's Third Most Lucrative Crime

Wildlife trafficking is worth some \$20 billion per year but frequently viewed as a low-risk, high-profit activity for offenders who face limited penalties.



By [Homeland Security Today](#)

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With environmental crime ranking as the world's third largest illegal trade, INTERPOL has joined calls at the United for Wildlife (UfW) global summit for enhanced collective efforts against the criminal syndicates behind wildlife crime and its impact on communities and biodiversity.

Poaching and trafficking undermine the rule of law and economic development. The transnational organized criminal groups that are driving the killing and extinction of species such as rhinos, elephants, big cats and endangering marine life also threaten the security and livelihood of local communities worldwide.

Organized crime syndicates trafficking ivory and other illicit goods to Asia, the U.S. and Europe are often also involved in the trafficking of weapons and drugs, fueling corruption, intimidation and even murder along the supply chain.

Against this context, the UfW summit (October 3-4) gathered some 300 global leaders from law enforcement agencies, conservation organizations and the private sector who reviewed pioneering work to drive policy change, support criminal investigations and shape sustained concerted action against wildlife crime.

Speaking at the summit, the Prince of Wales highlighted the serious and organized nature of wildlife crime: "The illegal wildlife trade is a crime that robs us all of our most precious natural resources, funds organized crime, and the harms of which are often directly felt by the most vulnerable communities. There are still too many criminals who believe they can act with impunity, too many lives being destroyed and too many species on the brink of extinction due to this heinous crime.

"But there is cause for optimism. United for Wildlife set out to ensure that those involved in wildlife crime face an international response as powerful and coordinated as any other serious and organized crime. To bring their sinister operations out of the shadows and to ensure that communities are equipped, empowered and supported to protect themselves and their natural world," added Prince William.

Wildlife trafficking is frequently viewed as a low-risk, high-profit activity for offenders who face limited penalties. In this respect, INTERPOL underscored at the summit the role of global cross-sector partnerships against the illegal wildlife trade, which is worth some \$20 billion per year alone.

"Often overlooked and under-prosecuted, wildlife crime is a sophisticated and serious crime with far-reaching and devastating consequences not just to wildlife, but to communities and the wellbeing of the planet," said INTERPOL's Executive Director of Police Services, Stephen Kavanagh.

"INTERPOL recognizes wildlife crime as an international security priority and we are committed to working with all sectors to pursue the criminals, disrupt their activities and minimize their harm to life and the world's biodiversity," added Mr Kavanagh.

Addressing the convergence between illegal wildlife trafficking and other serious crimes and terrorism, Mr Kavanagh further emphasized how wildlife crime generates income for non-state armed groups and terrorist organizations in Central and East Africa, citing evidence for example pointing to Al-Shabaab's involvement in the illicit ivory trade.

With its links to violent crime, corruption, and other forms of trafficking, environmental crime is a transnational criminal powerhouse worth more than \$280 billion a year, the third most lucrative crime globally, behind drug trafficking and counterfeit crimes.

Through its dedicated Environmental Security Program (ENS) and its center for tackling financial crime and corruption (IFCACC), INTERPOL is working with partners worldwide to target the huge profits made from these types of crimes, and help dismantle the criminal networks behind them.

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