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Task force established to combat wildlife trafficking

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Image: Reuters

A rhino is photographed during a rescue operation.

The US Treasury Department and South Africa's National Treasury on Wednesday agreed to form a task force to combat illicit finance linked to the illegal wildlife trade, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

Speaking at the Dinokeng Game Reserve outside Pretoria, Yellen told South African officials that the new task force aims to boost information sharing between the two country's financial intelligence units and to strengthen controls to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

The move comes amid South African media reports that the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which sets standards on combating money laundering and wildlife trafficking, could add South Africa to its grey list when it meets in February 2023.

Grey-listed countries are subject to greater monitoring by the FATF on concern they are at higher risk for money laundering and terrorist financing.

"Through closer collaboration to target illicit proceeds linked to wildlife trafficking, as well as overlapping criminal activity like corruption, fraud, and drug trafficking, we are taking a step in the right direction today," Yellen said after touring the game preserve, which has suffered from poaching of wild animals, including rhinoceros, in the past.

"To help save wildlife populations from further poaching and disrupt the associated illicit trade, we must 'follow the money' in the same way we do with other serious crimes," Yellen said.

Yellen said the US Treasury already worked to provide information on wildlife trafficking to law enforcement partners, and had also worked alongside South Africa with FATF to identify indicators associated with money laundering and wildlife trafficking.

The work includes identifying and seizing the proceeds generated from the illegal wildlife trade and impeding the money laundering and cross-border transactions of transnational criminal organisations often involved in corruption, she said.

"To make an impact against this harmful crime and the illicit financing that accompanies it, we must use this as an opportunity to build a consistent and durable approach," Yellen said.

South Africa is the last stop on Yellen's three-country tour of Africa, which is part of the Biden administration's push to deepen US economic ties with Africa and provide a



counterweight to China, which has dominated trade and investment on the continent for the last decades.

Yellen is due to meet with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa later on Wednesday.

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