



COOPERATING ACROSS BORDERS TO TACKLE ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME IN AFRICA AND ASIA

Environmental crime, including illegal wildlife trafficking and forest crime, is one of the largest transnational criminal activities in the world. Combating it requires cooperation across borders and along the entire criminal justice chain. Establishing an informal and trusted international network of customs officers, financial intelligence units, police and prosecutors is key to deter, detect, detain and dismantle the highly organized networks behind these crimes.



“WIRE meetings connect key actors in the fight against wildlife crime, initiating dialogue about common cross-border challenges.”

- Thai Customs Officer

ICCWC has been supporting Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement (WIRE) meetings since 2016 to strengthen regional cooperation and information exchange among criminal justice practitioners in the fight against illegal wildlife trafficking. WIRE meetings are an important platform to establish contact with and build an informal network of trusted law enforcement and criminal justice peers across Africa and Asia.

During WIRE meetings, specialised working groups drawn from police, prosecutors, wildlife and customs officials, along with the finance sector and international experts, consider a range of challenges such as controlled deliveries, transportation routes, financial investigations, mutual legal assistance and enhanced forensics techniques.

In 2021, participants met online to explore the use of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime as a legal basis for international cooperation and joint investigations, especially when national legislation does not specifically authorize (or exclude) such techniques for addressing wildlife crime.

They also discussed the use of end-to-end encrypted messaging applications to ensure fast response as well as the need to strengthen cooperation between the agencies responsible for investigating and prosecuting environmental crimes, including law enforcement, customs, wildlife management authorities, prosecutors, judiciary, financial intelligence units, and the banking and private sectors.

IMPACT

WIRE meetings have:

- ✓ Connected 200 criminal justice practitioners from 34 countries in Asia and Africa (2021)
- ✓ Established focal points and informal communication channels to share information about ongoing cases
- ✓ Enabled cross-border joint investigations, including support to the Mekong Dragon series of operations
- ✓ Strengthened capacities in forensic techniques and tracing criminal proceeds

LEARNING FROM CONTROLLED DELIVERY CASE STUDIES

WIRE meeting participants discussed the various challenges and complexities of controlled deliveries, including preparation, evidence handling, surveillance, take down and seizure. China Customs shared their experiences working with Singapore, Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam on parcel deliveries, which led to the apprehension of 2 suspects and the seizure of 33kg of ivory and 1,221 pieces of CITES-listed plants.



DID YOU KNOW?



Customs authorities from 20 countries and territories took part in **Operation Mekong Dragon III** from April to September 2021 coordinated by **China Customs, Viet Nam Customs, WCO RILO AP and UNODC**. The cross-border regional operation led to over 868 seizures, including 112 cases of wild fauna and flora.



In April 2021, Thai Customs Officers intercepted containers of endangered rosewood destined for China. International cooperation between China, Thailand and Vietnam led to the identification of falsified documentation, the discovery of a common timber trafficking method in the region, and the arrest of four people.

**ENVIRONMENTAL
CRIMES**
generate around

USD
\$110-281
BILLION per year (FAO)

THE **ILLEGAL
HARVESTING
& TRAFFICKING**
of timber alone
is worth up to

USD
\$152 BILLION
per year
attracting the
world's largest
organized crime groups
(INTERPOL)

ONGOING CASE EXCHANGES AMONG PEERS

Democratic Republic of Congo is working with Cambodia and Vietnam to pursue a criminal network trading ivory, rhino horns and pangolin scales.

Vietnam is cooperating with Nigeria on a case involving pangolin trafficking.

China Customs is exchanging information with South African police on a kingpin operating a network between the two countries.

Thailand is collaborating with Lao PDR and Democratic Republic of Congo on locations and CITES permits related to the shipments of pangolin scales.

South African police are working with Malaysia to intercept rhino horn traffickers flying from Johannesburg to Kuala Lumpur.

WHAT'S NEXT?

With ICCWC support, WIRE meeting delegates have committed to a series of concrete steps to be taken over the next six months leading to improved inter-regional coordination and the disruption and prosecution of wildlife crime across Africa and Asia. These next steps include building trusted networks between wildlife forensic laboratories in Africa and Asia, exploring controlled delivery operations on parcel deliveries of wildlife and related products, and developing guidance material on how to engage in international cooperation, both formally and informally.

United under the banner of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC), these five inter-governmental organizations form a unique pool of complementary expertise, providing a holistic approach to combating wildlife crime along the entire criminal justice chain.



ICCWC's WIRE meetings and work to facilitate cross-border cooperation related to wildlife crime is generously supported by:



Questions? info@cites.org