

REPORT ON TIGERS IN VIETNAM
CITES Management Authority of Vietnam
31 March 2008

1. Introduction

The tiger in Vietnam belonging to the Indo-Chinese tiger sub-species (*Panthera tigris corbetii*) was widely distributed in forests throughout the country. It is now on the edge of extinction mainly due to high economic value for its bones and fur and habitat destruction. In Vietnam there was no systematic survey on the number and distribution of the tiger up to now. However, according to the data of previous surveys and reports from local sources, it is estimated that tigers occur in 20 provinces with a total population of not more than 150 individuals which are primarily distributed in the common border areas between Vietnam-Laos and Vietnam-Cambodia.

The effects of severe deforestation, over hunting and trading for many decades on tigers and their prey have eliminated most tigers from their natural habitats and greatly reduced their number. The current populations of Vietnam's tigers survive in much deteriorated and fragmented habitats. They often live in small groups of 2-5 individuals and there are only two populations of about 10 individuals.

Since 1960, tigers have been legally protected. The species has been listed in E Category of the Red Data Book of Vietnam and Category 1B "no exploitation and use" of the national legislation. Vietnam established its first protected area as early as 1962. To date, over 100 protected areas have been established throughout Vietnam in most representative ecosystems and sites in many of which tigers inhabit. A number of training courses and awareness raising activities on tiger conservation have been conducted. In order to provide a legal framework for management and conservation of wild fauna and flora in general and in tigers in particular, Vietnam has promulgated various legal documents such as laws, decrees, decisions and directives on wildlife conservation.

Despite setting up a number of protected areas where tigers are distributed, tigers are now seriously threatened with extinction. Assessment of the present status and distribution of Vietnam's tiger population must be the highest priority in outlining, formulating and implementing a comprehensive plan for conservation of the tiger and restoration of tiger habitat in the country.

2. Present context and situation

2.1 Legislation

2.1.1 Vietnamese legislation

- Criminal Code 1999 states that "illegal activities of hunting, killing, transporting and trading of rare and valuable wildlife species prohibited by Government regulations or illegal transporting and trading of their derivatives" will be settled in accordance with wildlife protection regulations (Article 190).

- Government Decree No. 159/2007/ND-CP dated 30/10/2007 on administrative (fines) punishment of forest management, protection for violations in wild fauna and flora under IA and IB Categories (rare, valuable and protected species).
- Government Decree No. 32/2006/ND-CP dated 30/3/2006 on management of endangered, valuable and rare flora and fauna species of Category IB “prohibition of utilization and exploitation for commercial purposes”.
- Government Decree No. 82/2006/ND-CP dated 10/8/2006 on management of export, import, re-export, re-introduction from the sea, transit, captive breeding, captive raising and artificial propagations of wild endangered, rare and valuable fauna and flora. This decree requires that captive breeding of tiger and other wild fauna species register in government agencies.
- Directive No. 359-TTg dated 29/5/1996 of the Prime Minister on urgent measures to protect and develop wild fauna species regulating “government agencies at all levels tightly control of monitoring, prevention the illegal hunting of wild, rare and valuable fauna species.
- Decision No 54/2006/QD-BNN dated 5/7/2006 of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on releasing list of endangered, rare and valuable fauna and flora species under CITES appendices.

2.1.2 International legislation

Vietnam has participated in CITES since 1994 which regulate trading of fauna and flora species under its Appendices (tiger is listed under Appendix I).

2.2 Enforcement and implementation

Though Forest Protection Department (FPD) has proposed a Tiger Action Plan 2005-2010 to ensure the survival of existing tiger populations and their habitats and prey as part of Vietnam’s biodiversity conservation efforts which include activities such as surveys, assessment and monitoring, capacity building, legal enforcement, awareness raising and international cooperation. However, funding for the implementation Tiger Action Plan is limited.

Moreover, Vietnam has a National Action Plan to strengthen the control of trade in wild fauna and flora to 2010 which was issued in 2004. The Action Plan is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of wildlife trade controls by relevant enforcement agencies to prevent the illegal wildlife trade, striving toward sustainable governance and use of wildlife resources, and contributing to the implementation of the National Strategy for Environmental Protection to 2010. In addition, the Government of Vietnam has approved many programmes, projects and policies on improvement of livelihoods for communities living in rural areas, especially forested areas. They have helped reducing pressures on forestry resources in general and on tiger in particular.

Vietnam is a member of the Global Tiger Forum (GTF) and also selected as a member of the GTF Steering Committee. The country has actively participated in the forum activities and programmes while many other countries that have tiger populations have not joined the forum such as China, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Russia. Together with other GTF member countries, Vietnam continues to protect and

restore habitats and prey for tigers and updates, prioritises actions and budget for tiger conservation activities. Vietnam successfully organised the 3rd Conference of the Global Tiger Forum in Hanoi in November 2004 and actively participated in the International Tiger Conservation Conference and the 4th Conference of the Global Tiger Forum in Kathmandu, Nepal in April 2007.

Moreover, Vietnam is working with tiger range countries and interested stakeholders to develop a system of information sharing regarding tiger hunting, violations, settlement and control measures of illegal trade. Vietnam is collaborating with other Southeast Asian countries in wildlife enforcement network (ASEAN-WEN) which enhances the implementation of legislation on protecting wild fauna and flora in the region. These efforts facilitate tracking of organised and transborder activities that is common in tiger trafficking and trade in the Southeast Asian and tiger range countries.

In 2006 and 2007, there were several illegal captive breeding and illegal trades of tigers were detected in Vietnam. In September 2007, the Task Force of the FPD collaborated with relevant agencies checking Room 103B, B5 Block, Thanh Xuan Bac Living Quarter, Hanoi and detected and confiscated two dead tigers weighted about 250 kg/each. In addition, there were one complete tiger skin and tools to cook tiger bones and tiger bone products. Four people related to the case were arrested and prosecuted.

Four organisations and individuals in Binh Duong Province in the South of Vietnam kept 37 individuals of tiger, including adult and baby tigers whose parents were illegally bought in 2004 from unknown sources. A man in Thai Nguyen Province in the North of Vietnam is keeping three tigers. Two individuals in Thanh Hoa Province in the Central of Vietnam are keeping 17 individuals of tiger. All of them were fined for illegally possessing the tigers. The disposal of tigers is difficult since there are no rescue centres or rehabilitation facilities in Vietnam. In addition, the origin of the tigers is unknown and they are kept in captivity for a long time. Therefore, it is unrealistic to release them into the wild while the public does not support the euthanasia measure.

3. Conclusion

Though the Government of Vietnam has recognized early the importance of tiger conservation, tiger population in Vietnam is still threatened due to a number of reasons such as habitat fragmentations, prey base shortage, illegal trade of tigers and their derivatives. Inadequate legislation and enforcement and insufficient budget for tiger conservation compound the problems.

However, situations are improving in Vietnam thanks to better awareness of Government of the importance of tiger conservation and improved capacity of enforcement agencies. Legislation has changed to cover areas that previously left out or to tighten the control of trade and increase punishment levels to deter violations. More cooperation and collaboration with other tiger range and tiger consumption countries facilitate legislation improvement, capacity building and enforcement in the country.