

The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime

ICCWC



Information Note

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What is ICCWC?

ICCWC is the collaborative effort by five inter-governmental organizations working to bring coordinated support to the national wildlife law enforcement agencies and to the sub-regional and regional networks that, on a daily basis, act in defence of natural resources.

The mission of ICCWC is to usher in a new era where perpetrators of serious wildlife crimes will face a formidable and coordinated response, rather than the present situation where the risk of detection and punishment is all too low. In this context, ICCWC will mainly work for, and with, the wildlife law enforcement community, since it is frontline officers who eventually bring criminals engaged in wildlife crime to justice. ICCWC seeks to support development of law enforcement that builds on socially and environmentally sustainable natural resource policies, taking into consideration the need to provide livelihood support to poor and marginalized rural communities.

Who forms ICCWC?

ICCWC is comprised of the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO). The CITES Secretariat chairs the alliance.

Why these five organizations?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. The CITES Secretariat has been working since 1975 to help countries combat illegal cross-border trade in animals and plants.

INTERPOL is the world's largest international police organization, with 188 member countries. Created in 1923, it facilitates cross-border police cooperation, and supports and assists all organizations, authorities and services whose mission is to prevent or combat international crime. INTERPOL's General Secretariat has a programme devoted to combating environmental crime.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. Established in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention, UNODC operates in all regions of the world through an extensive network of field offices.

The World Bank is a vital source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world. Its mission is to fight poverty and to help people help themselves and their environment by providing resources, sharing knowledge, building capacity and forging partnerships in the public and private sectors. The Bank supports a global program of technical assistance on anti-money laundering and has played a leading role in international efforts to strengthen forest law enforcement and governance.

The World Customs Organization (WCO) is the only intergovernmental organization exclusively focused on Customs matters. With its worldwide membership, the WCO is now recognized as the voice of the global Customs community. It is particularly noted for its work in areas covering the development of global standards, the simplification and harmonization of customs procedure, the facilitation of international trade, trade supply chain security, the enhancement of Customs enforcement and compliance activities, anti-counterfeiting and piracy initiatives, public-private partnerships, integrity promotion, and sustainable global Customs capacity building programmes.

United under the banner of ICCWC, these organizations form a unique pool of thematically relevant technical and programming expertise, presenting the opportunity for a novel approach to the multi-faceted challenges posed by wildlife crime.

What is wildlife crime?

'Wildlife' means all fauna and flora. 'Fauna' are animals and birds, such as tigers and falcons, but also include fish. 'Flora' are plants, such as orchids or cacti, but also include timber and non-timber forest products, some of which are illegally traded at very significant levels.

'Crime', as far as ICCWC is concerned, refers to acts committed contrary to national laws and regulations intended to protect natural resources and to administer their management and use. This may start with the illicit exploitation of natural resources, such as the poaching of an elephant, uprooting of a rare orchid, unauthorized logging of trees, or unlicensed netting of sturgeons. It may also include subsequent acts, such as the processing of fauna and flora into products, their transportation, offer for sale, sale, possession, etc. It also includes the concealment and laundering of the financial benefits made out of these crimes. Some of these crimes will take place solely in the country of origin, whilst others will also occur in the country of destination, where live fauna or flora specimens, or their parts and derivatives, are finally consumed.

At the international level, crime also involves violations of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which regulates exports, imports and re-exports of wildlife. Countries of transit may also be affected. Wildlife crime is, therefore, no different from many other forms of illegal activities. Indeed, it shares many of the characteristics of other transnational crime types, such as illegal trade in narcotics. However, to a significant degree, wildlife crime has yet to be viewed, and accordingly responded to, as 'mainstream' crime.

Is wildlife crime serious?

Assessing the scale of wildlife crime is very difficult. This is partly because wildlife crime remains outside 'mainstream' crime and, so, it is not recorded in the way that drug-trafficking, murder, rape or burglaries are. Wildlife crime is also, in many respects, a victim-less crime. There are many indicators, and considerable evidence, demonstrating the involvement of organized criminal networks in the harvesting, processing, smuggling and trade of wildlife and wildlife products through sophisticated techniques spanning across national boundaries and continents. Fraud, counterfeiting, money-laundering, violence and corruption are often found in combination with various forms of wildlife crime.

Besides generating significant losses in assets and revenues for many developing countries, the theft of and illegal trade in natural resources potentially threatens the livelihood of rural communities, impacts upon food security, and risks damaging whole ecosystems. The cross-border smuggling of live animals and plants carries with it risks to human health through the spread of disease, some of which (such as the Ebola virus) are literally life-threatening. Diseases, such as bird flu, can also be spread to food chains, leading to mass euthanasia of livestock herds. The introduction of alien species to habitats can ruin the natural biodiversity of countries or regions. The ease with which some wildlife contraband is smuggled across borders, often in significant quantities, demonstrates very real threats to national security and the bio-security of States.

What are the challenges to effective law enforcement?

National wildlife law enforcement agencies, especially those in developing countries, face many challenges. These include: inadequate legislation; lack of equipment; limited training opportunities; difficulty accessing modern enforcement tools like intelligence-gathering and analysis and forensic science support; poor governance; and a limited appreciation among prosecutors and the judiciary of the seriousness of wildlife crime. Special investigative techniques and powerful tools, such as 'follow the money', are not mobilized to go after criminal organizations engaging in wildlife crime. Wildlife law enforcement officers often lack parity with their counterparts in Customs and Police services and are ill-prepared to respond to the organized nature of those who seek to steal natural resources.

Historically, efforts to support these officers, and their institutions and countries, have been poorly structured, uncoordinated and delivered only in a sporadic or short-term manner, often without having a full understanding of the nature or scope of the problem.

Poorly targeted and misdirected wildlife law enforcement can place undue burdens on poor rural people and local communities and can inadvertently weaken badly needed support for law enforcement and for compliance with the needs for sound natural resource management. As with other forms of crime, wildlife law enforcement needs to be conducted in accordance with national requirements for due process and with respect for human rights, public safety, and the rights of the accused.

Does ICCWC target particular countries, species or crimes?

ICCWC partners recognize the special protection needs of highly endangered and threatened species and ecosystems and the importance of addressing specific types of crime and criminality. Enforcement priority setting, however, needs to be done in a local context by appropriate authorities and policymakers. ICCWC aims to provide support on a world-wide basis and will not be restricted to any particular species or groupings of species.

What can ICCWC do?

Each of the international organizations involved offers specialized expertise that can support national enforcement agencies and sub-regional and regional networks. Each has extensive experience of providing technical assistance. Several of the organizations have already developed close working relationships on a bilateral or trilateral basis. However, before the concept of ICCWC, the five organizations had not worked in unison.

Several of the organizations have country or regional offices and bureaus that already work on-the-ground alongside national law enforcement agencies. Each, in its own way, has engaged in extensive research into crime and effective ways of combating crime. They have an overview of crime and smuggling that is simply not available elsewhere.

The organizations forming ICCWC have extensive experience in developing and delivering comprehensive training and capacity-building packages for law enforcement officers, at sub-regional and regional levels. Several have communication channels that allow real-time dissemination of intelligence to help national enforcement bodies in their risk-assessment, targeting and profiling activities and to facilitate investigations in different countries. They have experience in coordinating multi-national operations targeting illegal trade and smuggling.

In the mid- to longer-term, ICCWC is uniquely placed to successfully develop programmes to

- enhance awareness of wildlife crime;
- provide institutional analysis and support;
- build capacity of national institutions, sub-regional and regional enforcement organizations, taking into consideration the whole range of investigative and prosecutorial techniques;
- foster coordinated enforcement actions;
- support analytic reviews, especially through its Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit;
- mainstream wildlife crime across relevant national agencies;
- promote natural resource management and development;
- understand and address drivers of wildlife crime; and
- address the drivers of wildlife crime to reduce demand.