

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties

Ottawa (Canada), 12 to 24 July 1987

Interpretation and Implementation of the Convention

TRADE IN RHINOCEROS PRODUCTS

1. Attached as Annex 1 to this document is an outline report prepared by the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group of the IUCN-SSC on the situation with respect to the role of trade in the decline of rhinoceros populations.
2. The Secretariat welcomes this background document as a basis for discussion of this issue which has caused considerable concern over the last decade.
3. The situation is obviously extremely bad, and the Secretariat feels that it is necessary for the Conference of the Parties to address the problem as a matter of great urgency and to decide on a course of action to eliminate, or at least reduce, the illegal trade in rhino horn.
4. Therefore, the Secretariat has prepared a draft resolution on this subject (Annex 2) which, if adopted, will call for additional, stricter measures to be taken with respect to control of trade in rhinoceros products. The Secretariat believes that such exceptional recommendations are totally justified in view of the catastrophic decline in African rhinoceros populations caused solely by trade.
5. The report in Annex 1 does not necessarily represent the views of the Secretariat.

Status of Rhino Populations and Associated
Trade in Rhino Products

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Since 1970 the world's rhino population has declined by about 85%. Of those surviving, the best protected are the southern white rhinos of southern Africa. These have built up over the last 50 years from a nucleus of under 100 to over 4,000 today. In contrast, less than 30 northern white rhinos exist compared with thousands in the 1960s. The black rhino has also been heavily poached in most parts of its formerly extensive range in Africa, due to the demand for rhino horn in North Yemen (to make dagger handles) and in eastern Asia (to make traditional medicines).

The black rhino population stood at 65,000 seventeen years ago, but numbers about 4,000 today. Poaching has been particularly severe in Chad, the Central African Republic, all countries in East Africa, Zambia, Mozambique and Angola. Illegal killing of the last major population in the Zambezi Valley of Zimbabwe started in late 1984, with a number of people being killed and wounded in clashes between anti-poaching forces and well-armed commercial poachers. These poachers kill only a few elephants in addition to rhinos, since it is solely the high demand for rhino horn that induces them to risk death by intruding into Zimbabwe.

In Asia, 1,700 great-one-horned rhinos, 400-800 Sumatran rhinos and less than 60 Javan rhinos are all that remain. Since 1982, the main great-one-horned rhino population in India's state of Assam has been seriously poached. Sumatran rhinos in Sabah and Indonesia are also being killed in order to supply Asian markets with horn and other rhino products.

STATUS OF THE MAJOR RHINO POPULATIONS

1) ASIA

India: The world's largest population of great-one-horned rhinos, about 1,335. In 1982, a heavy outbreak of rhino poaching began in Assam due to breakdown in law and order and an influx of automatic weapons from neighbouring Nagaland. A minimum of 233 rhinos were illegally killed between 1982 and 1985 in Assam. The horn was exported to Singapore; however, some African horn is sold in parts of western India.

Indonesia: There remain about 500 Sumatran rhinos. Rhino was poached and horn was supplied to Singapore until October 1986. Resident Chinese have also reduced consumption of Sumatran rhino products; in 1986 only 6% of the pharmacies in Djakarta were offering rhino horn for sale as opposed to 27% in 1980. The last of the Javan rhinos are maintained in a game reserve on the western tip of Java. The guarding system was improved in 1967 with only one Javan rhino known to have been poached subsequently, in December 1984.

Malaysia: An estimated 120 Sumatran rhinos. The most vulnerable population (+ 50) is in Sabah, where at least 12 have been poached since 1982. Malaysia is also a consumer of rhino horn and skin. In Kuala Lumpur 10% of the pharmacies sold rhino horn in 1986 and 7% rhino hide, while in Kota Kinabalu the percentages were 11% and 6% respectively. A captive breeding programme has been initiated within peninsular Malaysia.

Nepal: Approximately 375 great-one-horned rhinos. Over the past ten years there has been very little poaching largely because the rhinos belong to the king who has assigned 500 Royal Nepalese soldiers to guard them. Almost no horn is consumed in Nepal, but some skin is used for religious purposes.

2) AFRICA

Kenya: Over 95% of the black rhinos have been lost during the past seventeen years; today only about 450 remain. Poaching in the last couple of years, however, has lessened. To protect the remaining rhinos in parks and reserves, the government has initiated the building of fenced-in sanctuaries. The first of these are at Nakuru and Tsavo West, where it is hoped that there will be good management and patrols.

Mozambique: In the early 1970s, there must have been several thousand black rhinos in the country, but due to heavy poaching, thought to be partly carried out by resistance forces to raise money, the number of rhinos is probably less than 500 today. In recent years, large quantities of rhino horn have come out of Mozambique.

Namibia: 350 black rhinos appear to be relatively safe at present in Etosha National Park, one of the large populations in Africa. In addition, there are 82 "desert" black rhinos known to have unique behavioural characteristics, in Kaokoland and Damaraland. While in the past, these animals have been illegally killed, protective measures are improving now. There are also over 60 white rhinos in the country, the majority of which are well-managed on private land.

South Africa: Possesses about 600 black rhinos and 3,500 white rhinos. There has been no poaching of these animals recently, but horn continued to be exported illegally in 1986 to Macao and probably Taiwan. Domestic legislation has prohibited the internal sales of rhino horn, but some still being used in small quantities.

United Republic of Tanzania: Rhino populations in the northern part of the country have been reduced by over 90% through poaching during the past ten years. Poaching continues in various areas. The rhino population in the Selous Game Reserve has fallen from about 3,000 in 1980 to less than 500 today. During the past few years, poaching in the Selous Game Reserve has intensified with the majority of horn being exported to Burundi.

Zambia: Very heavy illegal killing of black rhinos in their main stronghold, the Luangwa Valley, has reduced their population numbers from several thousand in the mid-1970s to under 500 today. Rhino poaching is out of control in many parts of Zambia.

Zimbabwe: The largest population of black rhino in Africa -- at least 1,700 animals. However, from July 1984 to April 1987, a minimum of 250 rhinos have been killed in the Lower Zambezi Valley, and at present there is a major confrontation between the Zimbabwean authorities and Zambian poachers in the Zambezi Valley. In addition, at least ten rhinos were poached in the Gonarezhou National Park in the south-east part of the country in 1986. There are also about 200 white rhinos whose populations are stable. There is no internal consumption of rhino horn in Zimbabwe, and the illegal stocks are exported illicitly.

STATUS OF TRADE IN RHINO PRODUCTS

The principal reason for this precipitous decline in rhino population is the sudden growth in the rhino horn trade starting in the 1970s. This expanding trade was due to the increasing purchasing power in the Middle East because of the oil boom and in eastern Asia because of rising imports of consumer goods to many countries.

Since the 1970s, the largest importer of rhino horn in the world has been North Yemen which has been importing about half the rhino horn on the world market annually. The horn is carved into the handles of traditionally worn daggers. Rhino horn imports were legally banned in 1982, but horn continued to be smuggled into the country.

In 1984, North Yemen began to suffer an economic recession due to the fall in the oil price which meant that Yemenis employed in Saudi Arabia and other oil producing countries returned home, thus reducing the country's hard currency income. In order to prevent the further loss of hard currency, the government cut back smuggling by increasing the number of border officials and enforced the law. The rhino horn trade was thus reduced. From 1982 to 1984 about 1,700 kilos of rhino horn were imported each year. Imports fell to less than 1,000 kilos in 1985 and under 500 kilos in 1986. Furthermore, fewer people can now afford daggers with rhino horn handles. Water buffalo horn is being used increasingly as a less expensive substitute. Only one out of twenty dagger handles is made out of rhino horn today.

In December 1986, meetings were held in Sanaa, the capital of North Yemen, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Economy, Supply and Trade to discuss ways of enforcing the ban on rhino horn imports further. A six-point action plan was devised which the government agreed to implement fully as soon as possible.

1. The Prime Minister would appeal to the main trader (who has been handling over two-thirds of North Yemen's rhino horn imports over the years) to desist from handling new supplies of rhino horn.
2. The Foreign Minister would talk to a senior official of the United Arab Emirates about controlling the imports of rhino horn into the Emirates which eventually make their way illicitly into North Yemen.
3. The government would issue a decree prohibiting the export of rhino horn shavings, which go to East Asia.
4. The Customs Department would encourage water buffalo horn as a substitute for rhino horn by eliminating import duties.
5. The government would request the Grand Mufti to issue a fatwa (religious edict) stating that it is against the will of God for man to eliminate an animal species.
6. The government would require all the dagger craftsmen to sign an affidavit stating that they would not use rhino horn, in default of which, their licences would be withdrawn.

So far, the first three points have been implemented and the Foreign Minister has promised that the final measures would be carried out before the end of 1987. The most effective measure will be the affidavit system.

The remaining rhino horn on the world market went to eastern Asia, where it is prized in Oriental traditional medicine as a fever-reducing drug. Since 1985, the last major rhino horn importing countries (South Korea, Taiwan, Macau and Singapore) have officially banned the international trade in rhino products.

Brunei, a small independent country, with a Chinese population of approximately 55,000 consumes Sumatran rhino horn and skin. The imports of Sumatran rhino products are legal, but their re-export is illegal. Further, the Customs Act was implemented recently by the Sultan, which bans the export of African rhino horn.

China continues to import rhino horn illegally, and Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and Thailand all exported shipments to China in 1985. The horn is mostly used as an ingredient in various traditional medicines manufactured in large factories in China's main cities, and exported to eastern Asia. Although China is a member of CITES, these medicines containing tiny quantities of rhino horn are legal because the horn, although on the ingredients list, cannot be readily identified. Small quantities of rhino horn are also available in 17% of the medicine shops in Guangzhou, where it is sold for US\$ 18,772 per kilo. This horn is imported illegally from Hong Kong. In Xian, 50% of the medicine shops sold rhino horn at US\$ 2,413 per kilo, because it is old stock.

Hong Kong is still a major consumer of rhino products although, since 1979 imports and exports have been illegal. In 1986, exports of "old stocks" were banned. Over the past couple of years, horn has been smuggled into Hong Kong from Macao and has been re-exported to China, along with some rhino skin.

In the 1970s, Japan was also one of the largest importers and consumers of rhino horn. Since 1980, when Japan outlawed its trade, little rhino horn has been imported and old stocks are being used up. In Japan, saiga antelope horn has been successfully encouraged as a substitute for rhino horn. In 1980, 44% of Tokyo's larger pharmacies sold rhino horn, but by early 1986, this had fallen to 17%. In Osaka, a more traditional city, the percentage fell from 90% to 76% during this period.

In 1984 and 1985, Macao, with its population of only 365,000, became one of the major importers and exporters of African rhino horn in eastern Asia, as other countries began to ban the trade. In December 1985, the Macao government started to outlaw it by refusing to provide rhino horn import licences to traders; and in February 1986, Macao conformed with CITES principles. However, rhino horn continued to be brought in, some from South Africa. Most of the horn is re-exported to China and Hong Kong (illegally), but the remainder finds its way into Macao's Chinese medicine shops, 80% of which offer rhino horn to patients.

Singapore banned the international trade in rhino products in October 1986, following pressure from the American Government and international criticism. While Singapore has not been a large consumer of rhino products (in 1986, 39% of the pharmacies sampled sold rhino horn, 24% rhino nails, and 15% rhino skin), because it was legal to trade in rhino horn prior to October 1986, it had been a major entrepot for Asian rhino products and indirectly stimulated much of the poaching of Asian rhinos.

South Korea used to be one of the largest importers and consumers of rhino horn in the world. In this country, the horn is used primarily in making Chung Sim Hwan balls for treating a variety of ailments. During the past few years, there is evidence that rhino horn shavings have been imported into South Korea from North Yemen. Legislation against rhino horn imports was passed in 1985. Water buffalo horn has now been accepted by the doctors as a substitute for rhino horn and is being promoted in the Oriental medicine clinics.

Taiwan was a major importer and consumer of rhino horn from the 1970s until 1985 when the government banned imports. In 1986, there was some evidence that African rhino horn was being smuggled from Hong Kong into the country via Kaohsiung. Taiwanese fishermen are known to exchange electronic goods for rhino horn in the international waters off mainland China. Rhino horn is widely consumed in Taiwan. A survey in December 1985 showed that 76% of Taipei's medicine shops and 90% of those in Kaohsiung offered rhino horn for sale.

Thailand has been a fairly large consumer of a wide variety of rhino products: horn, hide, nails, blood and dung, although the trade is illegal. Recently, most of these products have come from Asian rather than African rhinos. Bangkok businessmen buy whole, fresh Sumatran rhino carcasses for between US\$ 3,800 and US\$ 7,600 each, supposedly from Burma, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Thailand. A survey in February 1986 showed that 34% of Bangkok's Chinese pharmacies sold Sumatran rhino horn for US\$ 11,629 per kilo. One shop offered six Sumatran rhino penises for sale at an average price of US\$ 600 each in 1986. They are purchased by the Chinese for use as aphrodisiacs.

PRINCIPAL TRADE ROUTES AND ENTREPOTS FOR RHINO PRODUCTS

From 1972 to 1979, minimally, an average of 8 tonnes per year of rhino horn went onto the world market. From 1980 to 1984, the amount fell to an average of 3.5 tonnes per year due to the reductions in rhino populations. Most horn originating from African states was exported to North Yemen via Burundi, Djibouti, the Sudan or the United Arab Emirates; or it went to eastern Asia via Burundi, the Central African Republic, Namibia, Portugal, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United Arab Emirates or Zambia.

Burundi is the major entrepot on the African continent for rhino horn. Burundi obtains illicit rhino horn from Zambia, Mozambique, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Kenya. The import and export of rhinoceros horn in Burundi is apparently legal and therefore contributes to the decimation of a valuable natural resource in many African countries.

In Zambia, since mid-1984, poachers have crossed into Zimbabwe for rhino horn to supply the middlemen in the capital, Lusaka. Most stock goes to Burundi. The poaching continues, partly because the rhino horn is easily moved out of Zambia to the major world markets. It is known how this horn is transported within Zambia, and appropriate action should be taken immediately.

From Burundi most of the horn is exported by air to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where much of it is re-exported to North Yemen. There is no evidence that any of the horn is consumed in the UAE, but some is being stockpiled. Some rhino horn comes into Saudi Arabia (some of it to Jeddah) for re-export to North Yemen. Some is used for dagger handles carved by Yemenis in the Jeddah suq.

In addition, some horn from the UAE is transported through Saudi Arabia to the eastern border of North Yemen. The UAE is presently a CITES member. However, the UAE Government has announced its intention to withdraw from the Convention in early 1988. Measures should be taken as soon as possible to win the government's support for rhino conservation and to stop imports and exports of rhino products. The UAE is now the largest entrepot for rhino horn going to Asia.

North Yemen itself acts as an entrepot. Eastern Asian peoples and some Yemenis have been purchasing the chippings and dust in large quantities from the carvers (of rhino horn dagger handles) in Sanaa, and have exported it to eastern Asia. Since January 1987, however, the export of these chippings has been illegal.

Also since 1981, traders in the Sudan have been exporting considerable quantities of rhino horn, mostly by air, to North Yemen. The trade has been illegal at least since the early part of 1983.

In the past, Singapore was the main entrepot for Indian and Sumatran rhino products, and for some African rhino hide and horn. On 24 October 1986, however, the Singapore Government announced that, with immediate effect, all imports and exports would be stopped.

Although China is a Party to CITES, factories continue to export relatively large quantities of manufactured medicines said to contain rhino horn. From a technical point of view, this is legal since the rhino horn in the medicines is not readily distinguishable from other ingredients. Nevertheless, China should stop this trade by using substitutes for the rhino horn in order to end the imports of new stocks of horn. The main consuming countries in eastern Asia could also help by refusing to import medicines whose labels state that rhino products are contained in them.

PROGRESS AND IMPROVEMENT IN THE TRADE

Over the past five years, almost all the major consuming countries of rhino products in Asia have imposed laws to stop imports and exports: Hong Kong prohibited imports in 1979 and curtailed exports of "old stocks" in 1986, North Yemen passed a law against rhino horn imports in 1982 and outlawed exports of rhino horn shavings in 1987. South Korea's protective legislation came into effect in 1984 and 1985. Taiwan banned the international trade in 1985, the same year as Macao. And Singapore banned international trade in 1986. In most cases these governments have enforced their new laws, and the amount of horn going into these countries has decreased sharply.

During this period there have also been major efforts taken to encourage the use of substitutes for rhino horn and skin in Asia. The Japanese Government, for example, distributed a circular to pharmacists in the early 1980s asking them to use other traditional drugs instead of rhino horn. Now saiga antelope, cow, and water buffalo horn are widely used in place of rhino horn. The Korean Oriental Doctors Association, supported by research carried out at Kyung Hee University, began promoting water buffalo horn as a substitute for rhino horn in 1985. In North Yemen since 1985, dagger makers who have had difficulties in obtaining supplies of rhino horn have switched to water buffalo horn, and today less than one out of twenty dagger handles is being made from rhino horn.

Further, there has been a widespread international media campaign in newspapers, magazines, radio, and television deploring the desperate plight of the rhino and the need to discourage the demand for its products. The fact that fewer customers ask for rhino-based medicines in Asian pharmacies is evidence that the campaign has had effect.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The rhino is facing a severe crisis. In 1970, there were about 70,000 individuals of the five species. The black rhinoceros of Africa has been affected the most severely where its numbers have declined from an estimated 65,000 in 1970 to 4,000 today. Today under 11,000 rhinos survive representing an 85% decline due primarily to poaching for the horn.

Nevertheless, sufficient demand remains that if the rhino is to survive in the wild, the remaining problems of international trade must be solved. Further, based on the relative ease by which rhino products move between countries in Africa and Asia, which are Parties to CITES (and therefore must have legal prohibitions governing the rhino) implies complicity at the highest levels in public and private sectors. First and foremost is the need to close down the entrepots in Africa.

Because the rhino is facing a crisis, the internal trade in rhino products should be phased out. In order to avoid the problem of financial compensation, the legal possession of rhino products should not be prohibited, and countries should establish a time limit in which the existing stocks are to be depleted. In some countries where buying and selling rhino horn is still carried out in medicine shops, new stocks are purchased illicitly and passed on to customers as "old stocks". This, of course, encourages poaching for the markets. Also, the legal presence of rhino products in pharmacies further encourages buyers and stimulates demand.

For the rhinoceros to survive in the wild, more dedicated manpower and money must be allocated to improve the management of these animals. Each African and Asian country should produce a national strategy plan on how to protect the rhinos within their borders, and follow it.

Specifically, the following actions are recommended:

1. Bring political, diplomatic, and economic pressure on the Governments of Burundi, the United Arab Emirates, and Zambia to take necessary steps to prevent their nations from serving as entrepots for illegally obtained rhino horn.
2. Urge the Government of the People's Republic of China to prohibit export of traditional medicines which are stated to contain rhino products.
3. Request all CITES Parties to prohibit importation of traditional medicines which are stated to contain rhino products.
4. Request all those nations in which rhino products are traded internally to implement measures to prohibit said trade. Such prohibitions should establish a time-table in which existing stocks can be depleted.
5. All nations in which rhino products are consumed should actively promote substitution of alternative animal products such as water buffalo or saiga antelope horn, for rhino horn in products imported, exported or consumed internally.
6. Continue to improve management procedures for the remaining rhino populations in Africa and Asia, including: expanding breeding programmes; increased guard patrols; use of electrified fences where necessary and feasible; increased investigative police activities; and increased penalties for violation of existing laws.

DRAFT RESOLUTION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

Trade in Rhinoceros Products

RECALLING Resolution Conf. 3.11 on "Trade in Rhinoceros Horn" adopted at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties (New Delhi, 1981);

NOTING that the black rhinoceros has continued to decline catastrophically, and that the species is currently extremely endangered;

NOTING also the precarious conservation status of Asian rhinoceros species and the continuing threat posed to these species by commerce in their parts and derivatives;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the efforts of the Parties, the Secretariat and other interested agencies have failed to stem the flow of illegal trade in rhinoceros products, particularly horn; and that this trade is the primary factor responsible for the destruction of rhinoceros populations;

AWARE that the situation will continue to deteriorate unless drastic measures are taken immediately;

CONSIDERING that certain countries that do not have rhinoceros populations have been acting as safe entrepôts for illegal shipments of rhinoceros horn and have thus been stimulating the disastrous wave of poaching;

RECOGNIZING that poachers cross international borders to kill rhinos;

CONSCIOUS of the security risk involved in holding large stocks of valuable rhinoceros horn in a routine fashion in government stores and the fact that this has already stimulated criminal action and theft of such stocks;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION

URGES all Parties to take steps to establish the following measures immediately:

- a) a complete prohibition on all sales and trade, internal and international, of rhinoceros parts and derivatives, especially horn, whether whole or in any other form, including personal effects, but excluding (solely) legitimate hunting trophies where appropriate full CITES documents are issued to that effect;
- b) the destruction of all government and parastatal stocks of rhinoceros horn with supporting compensatory funds from external aid sources to be used for rhino conservation in the state concerned;
- c) the issuance of special instructions to all law enforcement agencies to be particularly alert to the problem of rhinoceros horn smuggling;
- d) an increase in penalties for individuals/companies convicted of relevant offences; and
- e) firm action against middlemen and poachers involved in cross border poaching and trafficking in horn; and

RECOMMENDS

- a) that Parties use all possible means (including economic, political and diplomatic) to exert pressure on countries continuing to allow trade in rhinoceros horn (including the "passive" allowance of such trade) to take the necessary action to prohibit such trade and to enforce such a prohibition;
- b) that Parties encourage the use of substitutes for rhinoceros horn and other rhinoceros products used; and
- c) that Parties encourage the development of national and continental rhino conservation strategies