

United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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Kerry Statement

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on Ivory and Insecurity: The Global Implications of Poaching in Africa

Washington, DC – This morning, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) delivered the following statement at a hearing that analyzed the global implications of poaching in Africa.

“Yes, we have a lot of urgent, everyday problems that consume our politics-- deficits, [unemployment](#), terror-challenges we know too well and numerous enough to make anyone dizzy,” said Sen. Kerry. “But history reminds us we never have the right to turn our backs on the values that define us. It is said that the elephant never forgets. Well nor should we.”

The full text of Chairman Kerry’s hearing statement, as delivered, is below:

Thank you all for coming. I apologize for starting a few moments late.

I realize that the issue that we’re going to discuss today may seem to some to be slightly off the beaten path of the usual topics our Committee has tackled. But I believe very strongly that one of the responsibilities of our Committee is and always has been to make sure that issues deserving attention receive focus – whether people believe that before they’ve heard about the issue or not, whether they’re on the front pages of our national consciousness today or not, it’s our [job](#), I think, to help put them there.

And certainly, even if we aren’t today thinking much about the global implications of poaching in Africa, I can guarantee that we will be if it goes unabated. In other words, in a country with a deep and abiding conservationist conviction which has rallied to the defense of our bald eagle and our American bison, it is just a matter of time before we awaken to poaching’s consequences – but if we don’t [act now](#), that time will come too late.

It would come too late for the elephants -- these enormous, lumbering, majestic animals which have been a sentimental favorite with people the world over. They are a living connection to pre

historic times and a reminder of our responsibility to the future by preserving the past. And just as we have fought to save tuna, salmon, sharks, tigers, whales, the American Eagle, and other endangered species, here too we have a special responsibility to future generations to live out our steward-caretaker responsibilities. How shockingly destructive and historically shameful it would be if we did nothing while a great species was criminally slaughtered into extinction. And yet, here we are in the midst of one of the most tragic and outrageous assaults on our shared inheritance that I've seen in my lifetime—where an elephant's dead ivory is prized over its living condition, where corruption feeds on its body and soul, and where money only makes matters worse.

Yes, we have a lot of urgent, everyday problems that consume our politics – I am more than well-aware of that – deficits, unemployment, terror-challenges we know too well and numerous enough to make anyone dizzy. But history reminds us that we never have the right to turn our backs on the values that define us. It is said that the elephant never forgets. Well nor should we.

We're fortunate to have a strong panel of witnesses who will [help](#) us shine a spotlight on this horrific and—regrettably—widespread trade.

Like all of you, I was shocked and saddened by recent news reports of the mass poaching of elephants in Cameroon and the surge in rhino and elephant poaching across Africa over the course of the past year. The pictures of dead elephants and hornless rhinos are heartbreaking. They stand as a grim reminder of our capacity to inflict harm on the natural world.

But I would also emphasize here the human costs of trafficking in ivory and other animal parts need to be focused on. This is a multi-million dollar criminal enterprise. The ivory trade stretches from the African savannah to the Asian market place, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ranks it as a significant form of transnational organized crime.

Poaching is not just a security threat for Africa. It's also a menace to developing economies, and it thrives where governance is weakest. Poachers with heavy weapons are a danger to lightly armed rangers and civilians as well as to the animals they target. They operate in remote territories and cross borders with impunity, wreaking havoc on villages and families. Increasingly, criminal gangs and militias are wiping out entire herds and killing anyone who gets in their way.

We also know that poaching is interwoven into some of Central and East Africa's most brutal conflicts and that many of those combatants are essentially members of criminal gangs, preying upon the communities, one against the other, and they're interrelated. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, UN reports charge that all parties to the conflict—including the Congolese Army—have participated in this lucrative trade. Multiple reports describe armed men coming across the border from Sudan into the Central African Republic or from Somalia into Kenya to kill elephants and smuggle out the ivory.

And the scope and lethality of the poaching industry is only increasing as armed groups expand their criminal networks and profit from the lucrative trade in conflict minerals and illegal timber. It's all part of a network. I learned that a long time ago as a prosecutor.

Don't take my word for it. Just look at the facts.

According to the African Wildlife Fund, poachers have claimed more than 900 rhinos across Africa these past three years. Between 2007 and 2011, rhino poaching increased by 3,000 percent in South Africa alone. Black market prices for these commodities are surging, with rhino horn at times more valuable per ounce than gold. And if that's not troubling enough, consider that more than 23 metric tons of illegal ivory were seized last year. That's nearly 2,500 elephants!

The net effect of these depredations is more insecurity, more violence, and more corruption—not to mention the devastation of existing and potential opportunities for tourism and economic development – and ultimately the depredation with respect to the stability of whole regions.

Given these very real risks, it is incumbent on all of us to ask what's causing this resurgence in poaching. And what can be done to combat it?

The demand side of this equation is crucial. According to UN assessments, East Asia is the primary destination for ivory and other products. People are buying it. The Chinese government and others have made substantial seizures, but clearly more needs to be done to eliminate the illegal marketplace.

On that front, I'd like to recognize the work of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In coordination with the State Department and other agencies, the Service is vigorously prosecuting illegal ivory importers here in the United States and working collaboratively with Asian countries to reduce demand.

We have other options as well. Along with several members of this Committee, including Senator Coons, Senator Isakson – who, apologizes, he had a conflict and wanted to be here today but he had a conflict – Senator Isakson is the Ranking Member on the Africa Subcommittee, and Senator Coons is the Chair, and he's concerned about it but he simply had a conflict. I've introduced legislation, S. 2318, to expand the State Department's Rewards Program to include transnational organized crime so that we can improve international efforts to reduce trafficking of all kinds.

And we'll hear today from our witnesses, the international community has also expanded its efforts to track money, and to following that money throughout the trafficking business.

Before it is too late, we need to explore how we can strengthen our partnerships with regional law enforcement services to help enhance their capacities to protect their communities, patrol their borders, and safeguard their countries' natural resources. I'm pleased to note that Dr. Julius Kipng'etich, Director of the Kenyan Wildlife Service, is here with us today.

With that, I'd like to welcome our very distinguished witnesses:

Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton, who visited with me last week, and we scheduled this hearing on somewhat short notice mainly based on that. I appreciate his leadership over many, many years,

as does everyone. He is the founder of Save the Elephants and has spent the last 40 years working on elephant conservation in Africa.

John Scanlon is Secretary-General of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

And Tom Cardamone is Managing Director of Global Financial Integrity, which focuses on illicit financial flows internationally.

Gentlemen, we welcome you here today. Very appreciative of you being here.

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