

**Testimony of Iain Douglas-Hamilton  
Founder and CEO, Save the Elephants  
on  
Ivory and Insecurity: The Global Implications of Poaching in Africa  
before the Committee on Foreign Relations  
U.S. Senate**

**May 24, 2012**

**INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am honoured to appear before your committee. My name is Iain Douglas-Hamilton, and I have been studying elephants in Africa since 1966. I founded the African Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN in 1975 and launched the first pan-African elephant survey in 1977, funded by WCS and WWF. I have testified three times before Congress in the 1970s and 1980s when elephants were in peril from the ivory trade. We are once again in that situation. We are experiencing a huge upsurge in poaching, possibly to levels as high as those witnessed in the 1980s before the ivory ban. This time, however, we have more eyes on the ground and some unified systems endorsed by parties of the CITES treaty, for monitoring illegal killing of elephants (MIKE) and monitoring illegal trafficking of ivory through TRAFFIC, and their Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS). There are also many independent elephant scientists on the ground and trained rangers of wildlife authorities.

We have slid into an acute crisis with the African elephant that does not appear to be on many people's radar in the US. What's happening to the elephants is outrageous, and the more so since we have been through these ivory crises before and should have found solutions by now. It is time for concerned individuals, NGOs and Governments to take action.

**Role of the United States**

I want to acknowledge the profound leadership role that the US has played in conserving the African elephants. In particular, I want to thank Congress for providing key funding for U.S. agencies that are working to conserve elephants in the wild. Specifically, there is the US Fish & Wildlife Service, which has provided a consistent source of funding through the African Elephant Conservation Fund. Then there is USAID, which is helping to conserve the large landscapes that elephants call home through its biodiversity conservation programs in Africa. Moreover, the US State Department has played a central role that bolsters wildlife trade enforcement efforts around the world. Collectively, these US led efforts have made a huge

contribution to elephants' survival. Without them the elephants would be in a much worse state than they are now.

Moreover US Conservation groups like World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Conservation Society, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Wildlife Conservation Network, The Nature Conservancy, and African Wildlife Foundation, and many others, are working across Africa to provide essential financial support, strategic guidance, scientific research, political connections, and capacity building opportunities on-the-ground for addressing the elephant crisis.

It is vital that this American support continues, and if possible be increased to deal with the current crisis.

### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CURRENT TRENDS**

Historically, the ivory trade has been the greatest threat to the continued survival of elephants in Africa. It was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that the trade first grew large and efficient enough to drive down elephant numbers in Africa significantly. Protective measures introduced in some countries in colonial times allowed a recovery in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The 1960s was the golden era for the national parks, when animals were exposed to mass tourism and became tame and approachable. Unfortunately, the ivory trade surged again in the 1970s and 1980s, driven by prosperity in the Far East, mainly from Japan. This caused massive elephant losses in East, West, and Central Africa and parts of Southern Africa. The estimated minimum elephant population of 1.3 million in 1979 fell to half that number by the mid 1980s and to the approximately 450,000 (with wide error margins), by 2007, the last time a continental estimate was made by the African Elephant Specialist Group. In 1989, the international ban on ivory trade went into effect, resulting in an increase in elephants in many parts of Africa, especially in the Savannahs of East and Southern Africa, though notably, the elephants of Central Africa continued to decline.

Evidence now shows, that strong demand for ivory is once again driving the illegal killing of elephants to unsustainable levels, and that most elephant populations in Africa are already in decline or soon will be so, some of them dramatically.

#### **Samburu Case Study**

I want to refer to a case study where rising ivory prices threaten elephants. This is in Northern Kenya where my organization, Save the Elephants, has been working for over fifteen years, together with researchers from Oxford University (my own alma mater), Colorado State University, and many other world class institutions in America and abroad. We have trained a first class team of local staff who take their place among African elephant experts. We record in minute detail the births, deaths, movements and social dynamics of a sample of about 500 known elephants, making it one of the world's best-studied populations. During this time, Samburu was a safe haven, and the elephant numbers increased. But a tipping point was

reached in 2008 when elephant numbers were reduced when drought and a spike in illegal killing took its toll. Since then, poaching rates have steadily risen, and last year saw the highest poaching rates recorded. Selection of bulls with big tusks has resulted in a population with less than half the number of males to females. And now poachers have begun to target adult females. This often has the terrible effect of leaving families without their leaders. The number of orphans within the population is increasing rapidly.

These changes correlate with rising ivory prices and a near tripling of the total number of seizures of illegal ivory in or coming from Kenya. Our work with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the security team of the Northern Rangeland Trust (an NGO supported by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), that engages local communities in conservation), has shown that local black-market ivory prices around Samburu have more than doubled since 2007. Now they are an order of magnitude greater than in 1990. A year ago we calculated that ivory of the largest male elephant poached in the Samburu population was equivalent to 1.5 years' salary for a wildlife ranger, or 15 years' salary for an unskilled worker. Since then ivory prices have soared yet higher to 18,000 Kenya Shillings per kilo. The incentives to kill elephants are threatening to overwhelm the capacity to protect them.

For poachers in the field across Africa, local ivory prices have reached a point at which criminals are willing to target even well protected, closely monitored populations. But in Africa, it is a fact that most poaching is easy – most elephant populations are poorly protected and offer soft targets. Based on the trends we were observing, Save the Elephants warned a year ago that the growing pressure on the Samburu elephant population, which is one of the better protected populations in Africa, might be a harbinger of what was to come for Africa's other protected areas.<sup>1</sup> I am sad to say that, in the intervening months, we have been proven correct, and elephant poaching rates have spiked across the continent. The least well-protected populations have been the hardest hit.

Scientific evidence from Central Africa has shown a devastating decline of forest elephants, documented in detail by Fiona Maisels of WCS and her numerous colleagues. Their exhaustive studies and analysis show that the African forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*)—which are taxonomically and functionally unique from the better known savannah elephants—are being poached at accelerating rates and have lost 62% of their numbers between 2002-2011. Their paper, now being reviewed for a scientific journal, compiles all previous references and is the latest and most comprehensive paper on the status and trends of African forest elephants.

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<sup>1</sup> Wittemyer, G., D. Daballen, and I. Douglas-Hamilton. 2011. Rising ivory prices threaten elephants. *Nature* **476**:282-283.

An analysis for West African elephant trends has been made by Bouchet et al that shows a similar downward trajectory. However, these elephants only comprise about 3% of the continental population at most.

Information has now come in from highly credible independent data sources and been triangulated, and all of it points in the same direction of a massive poaching surge

### **TRAFFIC / ETIS**

TRAFFIC, a joint program of WWF and IUCN-The World Conservation Union, is the world's leading wildlife trade monitoring organization. ETIS is TRAFFIC's Elephant Trade Information System that tracks illegal trade in elephant ivory using records of ivory seizures that have occurred anywhere in the world since 1989. Illegal trade in ivory has been steadily increasing since 2004. The increases were rather modest initially, but since 2009 the upward escalation has surged. Looking at 23 years of data, three of the five years in which the greatest volumes of ivory were seized globally occurred in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Tom Milliken, head of TRAFFIC's ETIS, referred to 2011 as the "annus horribilis" for elephants

### **MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants)**

The Monitoring Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) program is a site-based monitoring system under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The data gathered by the program show that illegal killing of elephants has increased steadily since 2006, with 2011 showing record levels since MIKE began in 2002. The increases are statistically significant, and poaching increases are happening in all four regions of Africa. Central Africa continues to show the worst levels of illegal killing relative to other regions, but all regions, even Southern Africa, had levels of illegal killing above the level thought to be sustainable by the Technical Advisory Group of the MIKE programme. Central African PIKE values, which consistently register at the highest levels, are coming now to East Africa.

Independent NGO project reports, Press Sources and the Scientific Literature  
In 2012, there is currently no let up in reports of the illegal killing of elephants. Unprecedented large-scale killings have been reported from Cameroon, from Garamba in Northern DRC, and from Kenya, Tanzania, Mocambique and many other countries. This suggests that this illegal killing is widespread across the continent and is at a greater level than any year since the ivory trade ban of 1989.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR SECURITY**

Poaching, by definition, entails armed individuals, often gangs, operating illegally in wildlife habitats that, in many cases, are protected areas that attract tourists and contribute to the economic development of many African countries. Where

poaching is particularly entrenched and pernicious, armed militias from one country temporarily occupy territory in another country, destroying its wildlife assets and posing serious national security threats on many levels. Every year, throughout Africa, dozens of game scouts are killed by poachers while protecting wildlife.

The increase of large scale (>800kg) ivory seizures is evidence of the growing involvement of organized crime in the illicit trade in wildlife. Illegal wildlife trade is often conducted by well-organized criminal networks that are undermining efforts to strengthen the rule of law and governance in many countries. Illegal wildlife trade in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has an estimated value of \$7.8 – \$10 billion per year, a figure which, if correct, would make it the 5<sup>th</sup> largest illicit transnational activity worldwide, after counterfeiting and the illegal trades in drugs, people, and oil.<sup>2</sup> In terms of its size, wildlife trade outranks the small arms trade. It also has connections to these other illegal activities – guns, drugs and ivory may be smuggled by the same criminal networks and using the same techniques and smuggling routes. The White House recognized the importance of addressing the issue last July. when it issued the President's National Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime and Converging Threats to National Security. This highlighted environmental crimes as being among the top five most lucrative criminal activities.

Middleman, ivory traders, often direct poaching activity and engage in targeted efforts to corrupt law enforcement and protection efforts. In some cases, organized Asian criminal syndicates, which are now increasingly active in Africa, work with local economic and political elites to subvert control systems and operate with relative impunity. The trends in both the MIKE and ETIS data sets are highly correlated with governance shortfalls and corruption. In other words, where poaching of elephants and illegal trade in ivory is most acute, poor governance is likely to be a serious operating factor. A related issue is the theft of government ivory stocks, a persistent problem in many African countries. Just last month in Mozambique, 266 pieces of elephant ivory, representing over one tonne of ivory, were stolen from the government ivory store in the Ministry of Agriculture building in Maputo. Overall, illegal trade in ivory produces a broad corrupting influence on governments.

Poachers who profit from killing elephants and harvesting illegal ivory may also have ties to criminal gangs and militias based in countries such as Sudan (in the case of Central Africa) and Somalia (in the case of East Africa). Longstanding historical ties between slave trading, elephant poaching and the tribes that now form Sudan's Janjaweed militia (which has been responsible for many of the worst atrocities in Darfur) mean that illegal ivory may well be being used as powerful currency to fund some of the most destabilizing forces in Central Africa and East Africa.

It is in parts of West and Central Africa where the situation is most dire and severe poaching is already resulting in the local extinction of elephant populations. This

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<sup>2</sup> <http://transcrime.gfintegrity.org/>

fact – and the connection between wildlife crime and regional security – has been dramatically driven home in recent months due to several high-profile poaching incidents involving large-scale massacres of elephants, violations of international sovereignty and the need for military engagement, both by Central African governments and the U.S. military.

Garamba National Park is located in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on the border with South Sudan. For many years, this park was supported by World Wildlife Fund and African Parks Network to protect the last remaining population of northern white rhino, as well as the park's elephants. The park was invaded many times by both sides during the long civil war in Sudan, and poaching by well-armed militias was common. The result was a steady decline in rhino populations from at least 500 in the 1970s to the last observation in the wild several years ago. As a result of the ongoing poaching, Northern White Rhino are now considered extinct in the wild.

Garamba NP is still home to one of the few remaining elephant populations in DRC, however. An analysis of elephant trends in DRC shows that there are probably now only of remnant populations of elephants in that country. The country's total elephant population is estimated at less than 20,000 and declining rapidly<sup>3</sup> – down from an estimated 377,000 as recently as 30 years ago.<sup>4</sup> Garamba NP is now co-managed by DRC's national park agency and Africa Parks Network, a Dutch NGO. Due to their efforts and the improved security following the tentative peace in southern Sudan, the situation in the Park has seen a steady improvement in recent years and a reduction in poaching. This was true up until March 15<sup>th</sup> of this year. On that day, a foreign helicopter entered DRC airspace, and 22 elephants were killed by a marksman firing from the helicopter, killing the elephants with a single shot to the top of the head. While the actual slaughter was not witnessed, a Russian manufactured Mi-17 troop-carrying helicopter was photographed in the vicinity at the same time. The helicopter was illegal and of unknown origin.

However, the most notorious and well-reported incident in recent memory involving the slaughter of elephants and violations of national sovereignty took place this past winter, when at least 200 and perhaps upwards of 400 elephants were killed in northern Cameroon by heavily armed, well-organized militia coming from Sudan and perhaps Chad.<sup>5</sup> In early February 2012, bands of heavily armed poachers illegally crossed from Chad into northern Cameroon's Bouba N'Djida National Park and, over the course of two months, massacred hundreds of the park's elephants for their tusks. The poachers, believed to be Sudanese with ties to the Janjaweed, travelled over 1000 miles on horseback, disregarding international borders to target systematically the elephants of Bouba N'Djida NP. The park guards

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bonoboincongo.com/2009/02/01/how-many-elephants-are-left-in-dr-congo/>

<sup>4</sup> Douglas-Hamilton, I (1979) African Elephant Action Plan – report to IUCN

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/environment/story/2012-03-16/cameroon-elephants-poaching/53564500/1>

were ill equipped, unarmed and few in number, and the Sudanese militants were able to operate with impunity for weeks. The Cameroonian government was slow to react and recognize the severity of the problem. Repelling the invaders eventually required the involvement of the Cameroonian military, with casualties on both sides and a resulting seizure of both ivory and weapons. The crisis even provoked the engagement of the U.S. military, including an in-person meeting between the President of Cameroon and U.S. General Carter F. Ham, Commander of U.S. AFRICOM.

Over the past year, similar poaching attempts have been made by Sudanese militants targeting elephants in Central African Republic's Dzanga-Sangha Reserve. Armed horsemen, believed to belong to the same band of Sudanese who raided northern Cameroon earlier this year, have twice attempted to enter the Dzanga-Sangha protected area complex, home to the majority of the remaining elephants in Central African Republic (CAR). The first attempt, in the fall of 2011, was successfully repelled by the CAR army after World Wildlife Fund and other partners on the ground alerted the government to the imminent threat. The most recent incursion by the poachers is still ongoing at the time of this testimony. In early May 2012, about three-dozen Sudanese raiders were discovered in CAR moving towards the Dzanga-Sangha Reserve. At least 8-10 elephants have been killed outside of the park, and operations to capture and repel the invaders by the CAR military are currently underway. Both Cameroon and the Republic of Congo are coordinating with CAR in the effort and have stationed troops along their shared borders to prevent the poachers from moving into their territory. While the outcome remains uncertain at the present time, such cross-border cooperation and a history of CAR's ability to activate its military and respond quickly and effectively to address these kinds of invasions inspires hope.

## **SUCCESS STORIES**

There are specific examples where support for increased security has shown measurable success and has lowered the level of illegal killing as measured by the MIKE programme. These include the populations in Zakouma in Chad, Amboseli and Tsavo in Kenya, and Dzangha Dzangha in Central African Republic. In each case, funding for an intensive anti-poaching programme has been instituted, having a positive effect. African Parks Network reported that by employing strategic anti-poaching tactics, they reduced poaching at Zakouma from an average of 800 elephants killed per year to seven in 2011. In Kenya in the last six weeks there has been a surge in anti-poaching actions implemented by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). For example, in the largest Kenyan national park, Tsavo, poaching gangs have been confronted, and a reduction in the number of poached elephants has been observed from the air and independently confirmed. Likewise, in Northern Kenya, a similar surge assisted by the KWS, the Northern Rangeland Trust and Save the Elephants has resulted in a recent measurable decrease in illegally killed elephants. These examples demonstrate that it is not impossible to win, and good enforcement on the ground can work.

As the example of Dzanga-Sangha demonstrates, this is even true in Central Africa, which is the hardest hit region of the continent and in many ways the most difficult one in which to work successfully as an elephant conservationist. Despite the repeated threats from militarized Sudanese poachers and the nearby massacre in Cameroon this past winter, not a single elephant was poached in Dzanga-Sangha in 2011, the first such achievement in many years. This was due in large part to strong protection efforts that have been developed over several years by conservation NGOs, such as World Wildlife Fund, and governmental and non-governmental partners, including USAID through its Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE). Another major factor helping to secure the park has been the cross-border cooperation that has been developed between park guards of the three bordering countries – CAR, Cameroon and Republic of Congo – each of which contain a portion of the Sangha River Tri-national landscape (Dzanga-Sangha is the CAR portion). Park guards engage in regular communication, joint patrols and joint law enforcement, so that information is rapidly shared and potential poachers can be pursued across international borders.

Another example comes from Gabon, where it is believed that more than half the remaining forest elephants exist. The Wildlife Conservation Society, using equipment supported by the US Fish & Wildlife Service, discovered an elephant killing field in Wonga-Wongue Reserve, where more than 30 large adult bulls were slaughtered for their tusks, and their carcasses left untouched. The ensuing intervention cleared the reserve of poachers and provided a necessary call to action, which the Government of Gabon heeded.

The examples in CAR and Gabon demonstrate that it is not impossible to win, and good enforcement on the ground can work. Central African countries can combat the environmental and security threats posed by transnational wildlife crime when governments engage and prioritize the issue, when enough capacity is in place to respond effectively, and when countries cooperate on a regional and transboundary basis. Such regional cooperation can also help to foment stronger regional ties on other issues and reduce regional tensions, as evidenced by the fact that countries that were at war not long ago are now engaged in joint security missions to protect their shared wildlife resources, including elephants. These resources, if properly protected, can form the basis for future economic growth in these impoverished, rural regions of the continent. In several African countries, this is already happening.

## **SOLUTIONS**

There are several main issues that need to be confronted, elephant poaching in the field, illegal trade both national and international, and excessive demand for ivory at the consuming end that drives the whole process.



### **Boosting Anti-poaching in the Field**

The methods used in Northern Kenya are the ones with which I am most familiar and are particularly revealing. I have been working closely with the Northern Rangelands Trust, which is a programme supported by the Nature Conservancy and USAID, where a detailed written strategy has been worked out, in close collaboration with the police and the Kenya Wildlife Service of how to deal with insecurity resulting from poaching.

The nomadic people of Northern Kenya are being settled through the creation of group ranches. It is important to build community institutions with good governance. When this happens the support of the people is guaranteed. The rules are that each community should elect officials, a chairman and a treasurer, and have annual meetings and regular elections to office. The Northern Rangelands Trust is not shirking all these essentials as part of its strategy as a donor.

For this, resources are needed. Political will and support from the government are essential, and these we already have. We also need helicopters, planes, more trained tracker teams as well as the informer network, the rapid response team, the skilled trackers, the local volunteer scouts. We want to create role models of African conservationists who will be looked up to and to found a conservation effort based on local values. Local ranger forces can become elite, which is a better solution than pouring in foreign manpower to solve an African problem. Kenya has been through bad patches before, with elephant poaching leading to chaos, and has come back from the brink. It can do so again.

The principal of local buy-in, combined with training of local people to be disciplined scouts and rangers and a healthy collaboration between the private sector, conservationists and the national wildlife management authority, give this project a good chance of success. It can be regarded as a role model.

I personally believe, that high-tech solutions can also help. Tracking of elephants by GPS and satellites was pioneered by Save the Elephants in Kenya, Mali, Central Africa and South Africa, and has now proved to be useful in greatly improving elephant security. This is one of several high tech solutions proposed. Save the Elephants is also developing algorithms to detect wounding and mortality and organizing patrols according to alerts that are generated automatically. If the resources of the U.S. agency DARPA were made available it would greatly promote these high technology solutions.

We would like to develop a new high tech collar incorporating more sensors that can give information of tactical use, such as gunshot detectors and accelerometers to measure fine movements. Thinking outside the box is needed to defeat the poaching and the use of remote sensors, gunshot indicators and drones would help to give an edge over well armed and highly motivated criminal gangs.

### **Lowering Demand**

The other main priority is to tackle the demand for ivory. There has been a paradigm shift in conservation thinking that acknowledges demand for ivory is the key factor driving poaching of elephants. Currently, demand for ivory exceeds supply. China has emerged as the leading driver of illegal trade in ivory. According to the Kenya Wildlife Service, 90% of ivory seized at Kenya's airports involves Chinese, and since 2007, the amount of illegal ivory seized in Kenya has gone up by 800%.

In hindsight, it looks as if the new spike in demand for ivory and the resulting poaching crisis was exacerbated by the decision in 2008 to allow a one-off sale to China of legal ivory harvested from elephants culled from the growing populations in Southern Africa. Where up until that point, all ivory had been illegal under the ban, this influx of "good" ivory into the market no doubt created the perception in the minds of potential Chinese consumers that it was no longer problematic to buy ivory in general, undermining the effectiveness of the ban. The result appears to have been a spike in demand, fed by the growing wealth of China and its neighbors, the confusion over legal vs. illegal ivory, and the predictable willingness of ivory traders to exploit that confusion and sell illegally harvested ivory as though it were legal.

In October 2010, I visited China to learn how the Chinese regarded their own elephants. In Xishuangbanna, the last of the wild Chinese elephants still hold out in the forests. I learned that the Chinese highly value their own wild elephants, and they are strictly protected. If China would respect elephants in Africa as well as her own, much of the problem would be solved. "If the buying stops, the killing can too." It is a phrase borrowed from the NGO, WildAid, that has much truth.

It appears, however, that the one off sales permitted in 2008 by the CoP of CITES may have promoted demand within China, which, along with Japan, was registered as having adequate controls in ivory marketing. Recent ivory trade studies by Esmond Martin, the trade monitoring information collected by TRAFFIC / ETIS, and investigations by the Environmental Investigation Agency, International Fund for Animal Welfare, and BBC Panorama have shown that the majority of ivory now on sale in China comes from illegal sources. Demand for ivory in China is flourishing as never before and is driving the illegal killing of elephants, but the consequences of their buying illegal ivory is largely unknown by the Chinese public.

For the first time in the history of continental Africa, large numbers of Chinese are living in Africa collecting ivory and shipping it out. This is an incredibly potent force when coupled with the fact that the Chinese probably have more financing available than almost any other investor in Africa today. According to Tom Milliken, Global Elephant and Rhino Program Leader for TRAFFIC, "There is more disposable income in China today than in history. Ivory has the cachet of being a luxury status

commodity, and more people than ever before are able to own a piece of ivory now. The demographics of China absolutely swamp anything."

Ivory trade controls have broken down. In other words, the controls that were imagined by the CITES parties to exist at the heart of the ivory importing, and would justify the one off sales of ivory, have failed.

If we accept that demand for ivory is the key factor driving elephant poaching, and that it is unsustainable, then it is logical that united world action is needed to lower demand for ivory if elephants are to survive. At bottom, China holds the key to the future of the African elephant. The preponderance of illegal ivory in China makes anything less than a moratorium a distraction and impracticable.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The United States Government should use its considerable diplomatic connections to encourage the two main markets for illegal ivory – China and Thailand – to take immediate measures to end the flourishing illegal trade. China's recent positive wildlife trade enforcement actions must be enshrined and sustained over the long-term. Ideally the US government could share some awareness of the elephant situation and work towards a joint leadership with China to solve the problem. If China would declare a unilateral ten-year moratorium on ivory imports, there would be a future for elephants in Africa.

And Thailand must enact serious legislative reforms to control its internal ivory market. Failing these needed actions, the US Government should ensure that those countries driving the demand are held to task at the upcoming CITES CoP in March of 2013. The U.S. should also consider application of the Pelly Amendment and the sanctions process that law offers in cases where CITES is being seriously undermined. I can think of no wildlife trade situation more serious than that now facing the African elephant, due to the exploding demand for and illegal trade in ivory.

Thank you for giving your precious time to listen to the plight of the elephants.