



Care for the Wild International

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United States Exposed as Major Importer of Illegal Ivory

When: Monday, 5 May 2008 at 1 p.m.

Where: Zenger Room of the National Press Club, 529 14th St. NW, Washington, DC 20045

A report released by U.K. conservation group Care for the Wild International (CWI) on Monday, 5 May, 2008 identifies the US as one of the world's leading ivory markets.

Between 1979 and 1989 man's hunt for 'white gold' has caused the death of 600,000 African elephants – half the population of an entire continent. In some parts of Africa and Asia, elephant poaching appears to be on the rise again.

The U.S. is one of the original parties to the United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which regulates trade in threatened and endangered fauna and flora. After decades of rampant poaching which decimated the continent-wide population of African elephants, the Parties to CITES banned the commercial trade in ivory in 1990. The report details the extensive commercial trade in elephant ivory within the U.S. that continues to thrive despite the international ban.

The report reveals that masses of ivory from poached elephants are entering the U.S. illegally. "We found over 600 retail outlets selling ivory in 16 American cities", says Dr. Esmond Martin, one of the ivory experts who carried out the research. "We found a staggering 24,004 ivory items, almost half of them in New York City. Half the ivory pieces for sale in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Honolulu may have been imported illegally." The U.S. is second only to China in sales of worked ivory. "Illegal ivory items are often sold as antiques, mammoth ivory or bone," says Martin.

"China is the main source of illegal worked ivory in the U.S.," says Care for the Wild's Chief Executive Dr Barbara Maas. "Bypassing Customs, U.S. buyers increasingly use the Internet to obtain it." This summer, China will once again ask CITES to allow it to import tons of elephant ivory from southern Africa.

CWI's investigation also uncovered a lively and largely unregulated ivory crafting industry in the U.S. Records of the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), which monitors illicit movements of ivory for CITES, document that the U.S. has had the highest number of recent ivory seizures and is classified as an 'ivory trade problem country'.

“Humane Society International is pleased to be a partner with CWI on this project”, states Dr. Andrew Rowan, CEO of Humane Society International, which partially funded the report. “We are concerned about increasing pressures on African elephants coming from both the international demand for ivory and the threat of elephant culls in southern Africa.”

“With regards to ivory trade, the U.S. fails to comply with both CITES regulations and its own national laws,” says Dr Maas. “The fact that these problems exist even in wealthy countries like the U.S. illustrates that legalizing ivory trade translates into more poached elephants. Our report also shows that China continues to fuel the killing,” she said.

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Images available at <http://www.careforthewild.com/files/Pictures15/>

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Note to editors:

Care for the Wild International (CWI) is an animal welfare and conservation charity that funds practical projects around the world. We make areas safe from poachers, rehabilitate sick or injured animals and provide sanctuary for those who cannot return to the wild. We also act as a global voice for wildlife through research, education and advocacy and expose animal cruelty and wildlife crime