



Message from the World Customs Organization

World Wildlife Day 2015

The World Customs Organization (WCO) is delighted to join the CITES Secretariat and other United Nations agencies, as well as other organizations across the globe, in celebrating the second edition of World Wildlife Day on 3 March 2015 under the theme "Wildlife crime is serious, let's get serious about wildlife crime".

World Wildlife Day was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 December 2013 and is celebrated on 3 March each year, the day the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora was adopted.

The aim of World Wildlife Day is to celebrate the many beautiful and varied forms of wild fauna and flora, to recognize the multitude of benefits that wild fauna and flora provide to people, and to raise awareness of the urgent need to step up the fight against wildlife crime.

Given the alarming increase in illegal wildlife trade, the international community has come to the conclusion that it had to join forces in order to tackle wildlife crime and that there was an urgent need to raise efforts across the globe to combat this scourge effectively.

At the London and Tokyo Conferences, both focused on wildlife crime, which took place in 2014, I took the opportunity to highlight the contribution and experience of Customs in combating the illegal trade in protected wildlife, while stressing the need for political will, an adequate legal framework, training resources, and partnerships with competent authorities and the private sector.

The call for a coordinated enforcement response, first emphasized in the Declaration issued by the London Conference, led to the Customs community's decision to further formalize its commitment to combat wildlife crime with the adoption by WCO Members of a Declaration at their June 2014 Council sessions, reaffirming Customs' determination to support all efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade.

Enforcement activities

Fighting environment crime remains a top priority for the WCO and Customs administrations as the international community becomes increasingly concerned about the way in which the planet is being degraded through insensitive and often blatantly criminal behaviour.

Located at borders, Customs administrations play a vital role in ensuring that all goods being declared for entry or exit are legitimate, while using a variety of enforcement techniques and their proven expertise to detect and intercept illegal wildlife, as well as other illicit goods.

To take advantage of the frontline position of Customs, the WCO has continued to actively organize and support global and regional enforcement operations targeting wildlife criminals in cooperation with its many partners, such as the CITES Secretariat.

In fact, the CITES Secretariat has acknowledged that Customs is one of its key “enforcement arms” and can serve as an efficient and effective deterrent against the proliferation of this universal problem.

INAMA, the new WCO capacity building project, which organized its first workshop in January 2015, focuses on strengthening the enforcement capabilities of Customs frontline officers in targeted Customs administrations in Sub-Saharan Africa, to detect, intercept and seize illegal wildlife consignments.

With illegal logging estimated to cost Peru 250 million US dollars per year, Operation Amazonas was conducted jointly by Peru Customs, the WCO and INTERPOL in early 2014. It targeted criminal groups linked to the illegal timber trade in Peru and resulted in the seizure of wood and wood products worth 20.6 million US dollars.

Operation Cobra II is another example. Supported by the WCO, it resulted in the seizure of 36 rhino horns, three metric tons of elephant ivory, 10,000 turtles, 1,000 skins of protected species and more than 200 metric tons of rosewood logs, dealing a huge blow to criminals involved in the highly lucrative trade in illegal wildlife.

These WCO enforcement operations are supported by ENVIRONET, a secure communication tool launched by the WCO in 2009 to facilitate environment, including wildlife, enforcement, by enabling Customs, other competent authorities, international organizations and regional networks to share real-time information and to provide reference materials, which are essential for successful enforcement.

International cooperation

At the international level, the WCO has continued to enhance cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, that share the Organization’s commitment to protecting the planet, as well as its wildlife, from criminal syndicates and their nefarious activities.

A powerful alliance in which both the WCO and the CITES Secretariat participate, together with the World Bank, INTERPOL and the UNODC, is the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) which was launched in November 2010 with the aim of combating wildlife crime through enhanced cooperation.

The ICWC released its “Guidelines on Methods and Procedures for Ivory Sampling and Laboratory Analysis” in November 2014 to support the deployment of forensic technology to combat elephant poaching. They were developed by the UNODC together with experts from around the world and provide law enforcement agencies with first-class technical information for advancing investigations and prosecutions, which will in turn positively impact deterrence.

In October 2013, the WCO formalized its cooperative relationship with TRAFFIC, a global wildlife trade monitoring network, through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. The two parties have agreed to pool their capacity building efforts and to enhance information exchange.

Under this spirit of cooperation, a two-day consultative TRAFFIC/WCO workshop took place in Bangkok, Thailand, in January 2015, with Customs officials, supply chain experts and wildlife professionals, including representatives from key shipping and logistics companies, airlines, couriers and transport associations in order to find actionable solutions to deter wildlife smuggling activities while strengthening supply chains and corporate policies.

As transportation is the backbone of global trade, traffickers in wild animals and wildlife products rely heavily on logistics, including land, air and sea carriers, to smuggle illegal

goods. Companies from the transportation and logistics sector can therefore play a critical role in identifying and strengthening key risk points in the supply chain, hence the need to work closely with them to combat illegal wildlife trade.

The Green Customs Initiative is another long-standing and ongoing cooperation programme that the WCO continues to support along with the CITES Secretariat. This initiative ensures that Customs and other border control officers are well-trained and have all the necessary tools at their disposal to fight wildlife and other environmental crimes.

Celebrating our natural heritage

Our wildlife is precious and an essential part of the Earth's rich biodiversity, making it incumbent upon all of us to stand together and take concerted action to protect endangered species from prevailing threats, particularly criminal syndicates operating with impunity around the world.

As 2015 is the WCO Year of Coordinated Border Management with the slogan "Coordinated Border Management - An inclusive approach for connecting stakeholders", the WCO and its Members will be using every opportunity to put this slogan into effect, including the enhancement of our cooperative working relationships with all border stakeholders.

Promoting coordinated border management and connecting stakeholders will go a long way in supporting efforts to combat the illegal wildlife trade, in addition to encouraging the sharing of information and intelligence to improve cooperation.

Coming together to celebrate our natural wildlife heritage under the banner of World Wildlife Day makes us pause for thought and realize just how precious our wildlife is and why it is so important to protect it for the generations that will follow us.

The Member Customs administrations of the WCO and the staff of the WCO Secretariat join me in expressing our very best wishes to all on this second World Wildlife Day.

Kunio Mikuriya

Secretary General

World Customs Organization