

## More than two tons of ivory tusks seized by Kenya Customs



Kenyan Customs officers at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport intercepted 2160 kg of elephant tusks and five pieces of rhino horn on 22 August 2010.

According to the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA), the shipment of 12 wooden boxes was declared to Customs as fresh avocados heading to Malaysia. However, the nature of the goods and the packaging, weight and destination raised the suspicion of Customs officers.



A subsequent physical examination revealed 317 pieces of ivory and five rhino horns wrapped in foil and concealed underneath the fruit. Documentation shows that several similar shipments to the same destination have been exported by the same company in Kenya and an investigation has been launched jointly by the KRA in collaboration with other Kenyan enforcement agencies.



Upon being advised of the the seizure, the WCO Secretariat responded immediately by disseminating the information and coordinating contact between the Kenyan and Malaysian Customs administrations to facilitate an investigation.

There has been a sharp increase in ivory seizures by Customs administrations worldwide. At least 25 tons of ivory tusks and ivory products in 22 significant seizures were reported in 2009. The trend does not seem to have eased in 2010. Up until August this year, over 11 tons of raw ivory tusks have been intercepted in seven big hauls by Customs services in Hong Kong, China, Kenya, Thailand, and Vietnam alone. Some significant 2010 seizures include:

Hong Kong, China Customs officers at Kwai Chung Container Terminal uncovered 1002 kg (186 pieces) of ivory tusks inside a container on 7 January. The container had departed from Nigeria via Malaysia
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Acting on intelligence, Royal Thai Customs officials at the Suvarnabhumi Airport Cargo Clearance Customs Bureau raided a warehouse on 24 February that led to the seizure of 2075 kg (239 pieces) of raw ivory tusks shipped by air from Kenya via Dubai. The shipment was priced at USD 3.8 million in the local market. It was declared as telecom equipment, and destined for the Lao Republic.
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Acting on a tip-off, the Royal Thai Customs seized 1390 kg of ivory tusks sent from Kenya via Qatar to Bangkok International Airport. The shipment was declared as printing metal and bound for a Thai company based in Bangkok.
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On 14 May, Customs officers at Hai Phong sea port, Vietnam found 1665 kg (367 cut pieces) of elephant tusks hidden among dried seaweed and snail shells arriving from Malaysia on board a vessel. This was the fifth major seizure of ivory by Customs at the port since 2009.
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On 29 April, officers at the Hai Phong sea port in Vietnam discovered 2194 kg of elephant tusks cut into 985 pieces and hidden in two shipping containers from Mombasa, Kenya carrying dried seaweed.
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WCO Members are urged to continue to take urgent and effective action against this malicious transnational trade in collaboration with other law enforcement agencies as the international community and governments in the ranging states rely on Customs and its partners to protect the earth's natural heritage which once lost, is lost forever.

More information: See the 61<sup>st</sup> Edition of the WCO News magazine issued in February 2010.