

Royal Support

At an Illegal Trade meeting held In May 2013 for the first time together, Father and Son, HRH the Prince of Wales and HRH the Duke of Cambridge formally pledged their support for action against wildlife crime. Needless to say, such high profile support with the will to rally action at a heads of state level is badly needed.

RhiNOremedy attended this meeting which saw the convening of many global NGOs, charities, conservationists and scientists alongside government representatives from many countries where wildlife crime is a major issue. Representatives from China however had been invited, but were notably absent.

The aim of the meeting was to lay the groundwork for a meeting in late 2013 at Heads of State level to help combat the illegal wildlife trade. As well as raising awareness about the issue, there are three priorities: (i) reducing demand for wildlife and wildlife products; (ii) strengthening law enforcement; and (iii) assisting rural communities to find long-term, viable alternatives to participating in illegal trade.

The morning's events

Initially the attendees meeting briefly in the reception room, with many introductions being made and conversations striking up about the shocking upsurge in poaching. There was an undercurrent of optimism of the potential future impacts that such a meeting could have.

All the attendees then moved to the meeting room and took seats for a number of presentations that had been prepared. The presentations began with Interpol, CITES, TRAFFIC and WildAid. These introduced the current nature of wildlife crime, the fact it is now a global crime issue which threatens the national security of many countries. It was made clear that equally, a global response would be required to tackle such crime with enhanced political will and combined efforts from all stakeholders. A new wildlife crime was also highlighted by CITES; the speculative buying and stockpiling of products – opportunism in extinction. It was also stated that where there have been global efforts to stem the supply of wildlife products into illegal trade markets, there now needed to be much greater effort than ever before to stem the demand for such products. It was made clear by WildAid that efforts to stem demand have already been successful in the past, and are beginning to be successful again. The issue now is that there are new and emerging markets within new consumer regions and countries – reaching out to such societies is key.

Presentations continued firstly with a presentation by the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) of South Africa. The work being done to tackle wildlife crime, specifically rhino poaching, was highlighted, much of which can also be seen [here](https://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/docs/interventionto_adressillegal_killingofrhinos.pdf). (https://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/docs/interventionto_adressillegal_killingofrhinos.pdf)

There was no mention of the recent push by South Africa to look into and facilitate the legalisation of trade in rhino horn; a contentious issue. The presentation was also not met with the enthusiasm and optimism which for the most part had been building in the room.

The United Nations office on drugs and crime then presented. This further established the links between wildlife crime and other transnational crimes such as drugs, arms and people trafficking. The commitment by the UN to develop capacity to deal with the issue was stated, but also that political will was key.

Initial presentations concluded with the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), Kenya, and Gabon National Parks. Both highlighted and visualised the in-country impacts and the growth in the threat of poaching which was acting to destabilise entire countries. Speakers advised that a community approach to conservation is key to the future of wildlife, as is the political will to protect each countries national heritage.

A short-break allowed attendees to gather their thoughts before reconvening for the final part of the meeting.

Landmark words

HRHs Prince Charles and Prince William then joined the meeting which they, with the UK government, had called in response to the global crisis facing wildlife threatened by illegal trade.

The words were strong and the sentiment clear, this must be challenged at the highest level if we, the global community, and our future generations are going to have any chance of conserving the richness of the world's biodiversity.

HRH Prince Charles simply made the link clear; it is a short step between losing a species, losing a habitat and losing the biodiversity on which we all depend and there was an urgent need (“urgent means urgent”) to tackle the issue of wildlife crime. An important priority is to reduce the demand in consumer countries and that stamping out wildlife crime needs to be near the top of the global agenda – the threat to wildlife also threatens global security. Losing such species (charismatic species threatened by illegal trade), would be “an immeasurable stain on the whole course of human history.”

HRH Prince William eluded to his own fears and hopes; a fear that one of two things would happen, either action is taken, or we simply run out of the animals, and the hope that this generation would not be the first to consider elephants and rhinos as historical animals. Wildlife crime was described as 'ecological sabotage' with, for example, the benefits for communities and the world from a countries' wildlife effectively being wiped out. Education amongst the next generation of end users was described as a key part of tackling the issue, as well as clarity in the fact that the 'luxury' striven for by many such as to own an ivory trinket, was at complete odds with the source – the barbarity of accessing such products. Young people are the future and by engaging the next generation globally, issues such as wildlife crime can be tackled.

Future Plans

The morning meeting came to a close with a presentation from DEFRA. The three approaches to tackling wildlife crime were outlined as; improved enforcement, reducing market demand and supporting communities to develop viable alternatives. It is an aim and a commitment to eradicate trafficking and if we fail, the legacy for our children would be shame for us all.

There was time to reflect on the morning's events and meet with fellow attendees and our hosts. The feeling was of cautious optimism that something at a high level was beginning to happen and that wildlife conservation in the face of some serious global challenges was going to move up the agenda. A real positive was the gathering of all the organisations and the conclusion that it was time to work on joint efforts to tackle this issue.

The morning had concluded, but the afternoon continued with a government level meeting which included the representatives from governments around the world that had been there during the morning.

The next step; there are plans for a Heads of State meeting which will take place in the Autumn of 2013, for which this meeting laid the foundation. It is with real hope that this much needed support evolves into impactful action on a global scale to deliver on reducing the supply and demand for wildlife products, enforcing existing and new laws and protecting our global biodiversity – our amazing habitats and species – for the distant future.