



The Rise of Environmental Crime

Useful stats

- The value of the illegal wildlife trade is estimated by some to be \$7-23 billion per year.
- Illegal mining is estimated at \$12-48 billion; waste at \$10-12 billion; and illegal fisheries is estimated at \$11-23 billion.
- Environmental crime costs governments \$9-26 billion annually through lost tax income.
- In one INTERPOL operation in Venezuela in 2013 19,500 truckloads worth of illegally harvested timber was seized.
- An estimated 50-90% of logging is illegal in many tropical countries, and is laundered through pulp and paper, or through shell companies posing as plantations.
- The Colombian rebel group FARC makes an estimated \$12 million every year from extorting illegal gold miners. In the Amazon region, armed groups tax gold, coltan (a mineral used in mobile phones) and timber to fund their operations.
- In Tanzania, the government with support from partner agencies like INTERPOL have trained over 2,000 rangers as trackers to locate poachers killing elephants in the bush. The rangers are given training in tracking, crime scene management and tactics.
- More than one thousand rangers have been killed worldwide against heavily armed poachers in the last decade.
- Most rangers lack basic equipment such as uniforms, weapons, vehicles, radios, maps and the most basic accommodation.
- The UN Security Council tasked on March 30th (2016) MONUSCO, the largest peacekeeping mission in the UN with over 21,000 troops in DRC and a Force Intervention Brigade with drones and attack helicopters, with preventing rebels from profiting from the plunder of natural resources.
- The Security council has mandated MONUSCO to neutralize rebel groups and, for the first time, tasked the force with collecting information on the criminal networks involved in the conflict and the looting of resources like gold, coltan, timber and charcoal, a crime that generates more than half a billion dollars annually.

Damage to ecosystems

Artisanal miners in the Amazon tip 30 tonnes of the toxic metal mercury into the region's rivers and lakes every year, poisoning fish and causing brain damage in humans living as far as 400km downstream.

With the loss of forests from illegal logging, comes the loss of ecosystem services like clean water and clean air with major impacts on human health and wellbeing. Forests are also vital for mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Criminals also directly threaten our climate: about 800 tonnes of ozone depleting substances had been seized by 2010, and in 2014 unwanted trade in more than 545 tonnes of ozone depleting substances including HCFCs and halons was prevented

Fisheries crime

This type of crime, worth an estimated \$11-23 billion, often involves criminal networks organised as mafia-style hierarchies. Other criminal groups operate with the implicit support of their governments.

In one recent case, a fishing vessel, VIKING, was stopped and found to be operating illegally. Over more than 10 years, it is estimated that this vessel caught 10,000 tonnes of Patagonian toothfish with a market value of \$200-300 million. In some countries like Indonesia the Navy now boards and arrests illegal fishermen – and subsequently sinks the vessels, often with explosives to deter the rising numbers of illegal fisheries. A similar technique has been applied against pirates.

Signs of Success

Until recently, the Amazon rainforest had one of the highest deforestation rates in the world.: This trend was reversed with the largest victory against environmental crime to date, which took place in Brazil when the country launched an unprecedented crackdown on eco-criminals that saw teams of special forces, SWAT teams, satellite monitoring, intelligence officials and others from the country's law enforcement agencies swoop on the cartels involved in these crimes. This reduced deforestation in the Amazon by 76 per cent in just five years.

Launched in 2003, the crackdown led to the handing out of fines totalling \$3.9 billion, 700 arrests, the seizure of 1 million m3 of tropical timber and the confiscation or destruction of 11,000 properties, pieces of equipment and assets.

The success of the Plan for the Protection and Combatting Deforestation in the Amazon (PPCDAM) hinged to a great extent on the fact that a single office – that of the executive office of the presidency – was placed in charge of co-ordinating the entire plan.

“The example of Brazil shows what can be achieved when you have strong leadership,” said Steiner. “In the case of Brazil, robust command and control centres, improved intelligence gathering, the use of satellites and the beefed up enforcement of protected areas dealt a severe blow to the criminals behind these heinous crimes and led to staggering environmental improvements.”

Solutions

Reduce Threats to security and peace: Strengthen the information collection, analysis and sharing, across sectors, in peacekeeping missions, Sanctions Committees and across the UN as a whole on the role of natural resource exploitation in conflicts and security in order to inform holistic responses towards securing peace, security and sustainable development. This includes integrating INTERPOL liaison officers in peacekeeping missions.

Rule of law: The international community must recognize and address environmental crimes as a serious threat to peace and sustainable development and strengthen the environmental rule of law at all levels to prevent safe havens including disrupting overseas tax havens, improve legislation at international and national levels, implement dissuasive penalties, substantial sanctions and punishments, capacity building and technological support, in order to enhance the enforcement and adjudication capacities in the area of environmental crime.

Leadership: Governments should establish central coordination and national cross-sectoral plans, such as the PPCDAM by Brazil, with unity of command and unity of efforts, in coordination with the relevant UN entities, INTERPOL, and other relevant international treaty bodies and institutions, to combat the involvement of criminal organized groups in environmental crimes.

Financial support: Call upon the international development community to recognize and address environmental crime as a serious threat to sustainable development and strengthen the share of ODA to governance and judicial sector reform including to combating and preventing environmental crime. This should be targeted to capacity building and technological support to relevant agencies, national, regional and global law enforcement efforts against environmental crimes, such as information and analysis, inter-agency collaboration, enforcement, prosecution and the judiciary, especially in developing countries and fragile states.

Economic incentives and consumer awareness: Strengthen economic incentives, relevant institutions and awareness. This requires that plans for alternative livelihoods, economic incentives and consumer awareness also in importing countries are fully integrated and coordinated with enforcement efforts. Identifying best practices in behavioural change should be undertaken to reduce demand, including through a Communications Summit to address all points of this trade.

Recent INTERPOL operations against eco-criminals

Highlights of 2015 INTERPOL Coordinated Operations (Wildlife, Fisheries and Forestry Crime)		
Operation PAWS II targeting criminal networks involved in wildlife crime in Asia	Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, with support from Australia, Canada, Russia, and the United States	The operation resulted in a number of significant outcomes, including the location of a Red Notice fugitive, the issuing of a number of Purple Notices and 305 arrests including arrests of middlemen in the tiger and ivory trades. The operation also resulted in the seizure of 12 big cat skins (including three tiger skins) and quantities of bones, 9.3 tonnes of ivory and 37 rhino horns, almost 2,000 turtles plus other reptiles, five tonnes of processed pangolin meat, 275 kg of pangolin scales, 282 pangolins and almost 1,500 tonnes of rosewood.
Operation Worthy II targeting ivory and rhino horn trafficking in Africa	Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia	The operation resulted in 376 arrests, the seizure of 4.5 tonnes of elephant ivory and rhino horn and the investigation of 25 criminal groups involved in the illicit trade. In addition to this, 2,029 pangolin scales, 173 live tortoises, 55 kg of sea cucumber, warthog teeth, big cat, pangolin and python skins and impala carcasses, as well as 532 rounds of ammunition, five firearms and two home-made rifles were seized during the operation

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Operation Log targeting the illegal trade of timber in West Africa	Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo	The operation resulted in the seizure of more than USD 216 million in illegally harvested rosewood (<i>Pterocarpus Erinaceus</i>) and other timber species, with 44 individuals arrested and the identification of key trade routes used by criminal networks to traffic illegally rosewood in the region.
Operation Amazonas II targeting illegal logging and trade of timber in Central and South America	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay and Peru	<p>The operation across 12 countries has led to the seizure of more than 53,000 cubic metres of illegal timber – enough to fill 20 Olympic-sized swimming pools or equivalent of over 5,000 truckloads. In addition, 25,000 logs and 1,200 sacks of charcoal were also recovered, and more than 200 individuals were arrested.</p> <p>Types of timber with the highest risk for trafficking were pine, black rosewood, big-leaf mahogany, cedar and laurel – most of which are protected species.</p>
Operation Stingray II	Australia, Canada, New	Six vessels of interest were

	Zealand, Norway and the United States of America	<p>targeted: the SNAKE, THUNDER, KUNLUN, SONGUA and YONGDING, and PERLON (not subject to an INTERPOL Purple Notice).</p> <p>As of May 2016, the SNAKE and THUNDER are out of service (sunk), and the SONGHUA, KUNLUN and YONGDING are detained by law enforcement.</p> <p>The Captain and two crew members of the THUNDER are found guilty in Sao Tome and Principe of multiple charges related to the sinking of the vessel in April 2015. Prison sentences range from 32 to 36 months, and a fine of EUR 14,000,000</p> <p>Vessel PERLON has been sanctioned USD 3.5 million by the Malaysian Authorities</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Only in 2015 6 INTERPOL Purple Notices and 17 Blue Notices were issued at the request of member countries to support national investigations in Indonesia, Malaysia, São Tome and Principe, Spain, Senegal and Thailand.</p> <p>During these investigations, companies involved in a network of illegal fishing vessels were raided, nine people were arrested in two countries, and 17 remain under investigation on charges of organized crime, money laundering, document falsification, and crimes against the environment.</p>
Operation Pescam	Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, el salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic	The operation resulted in the identification and disruption of criminal networks behind the illegal trade of shark fins, illegal

		trade of protected species such as Iguanas Maritimas, sea cucumber and sea horses; and the Illegal trade of bill fish called Pez Vela in Guatemala.
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