

**Central African Sub-Regional Workshop on Wildlife Trafficking and Dismantling
Transnational Illicit Networks
Libreville, Gabon
3-5 April 2012**

CHAIR SUMMARY

The Governments of Gabon and the United States co-chaired a Sub-Regional Workshop for Central Africa on Wildlife Trafficking and Dismantling Transnational Illicit Networks on April 3-5 in Libreville, Gabon, during which the Central African government representatives conceptualized a regional wildlife enforcement network to combat wildlife trafficking and dismantle cross-border illicit networks. The Gabonese and Central African Republic Ministers of Water and Forests reaffirmed their commitment to combat poaching and trafficking of wildlife and urged stronger law enforcement efforts, greater international cooperation, and a regional approach in addressing the issues. Senior U.S. government officials support central African countries in their efforts.

Growing concerns were addressed about the threats posed to communities, ecosystems, institutions, and markets by poaching and trafficking in protected and endangered wildlife. Today, 30% of the species hunted in the Congo Basin are threatened. According to the World Wildlife Fund, illegal trans-boundary wildlife traded per year is estimated to be between \$7.8 and \$10 Billion USD. This makes wildlife trafficking the fifth highest illegal traded commodity in the world, after drugs (\$320B), counterfeiting (\$250B), humans (\$31.6B), and oil (\$10.8B). Heavily-armed poachers operating in central Africa—who have attacked law enforcement and military personnel—have become a threat to the national security of central African countries. Furthermore, poaching and wildlife trafficking are largely intertwined with other criminal activities of transnational illicit networks that contribute to the insecurity and instability of economies globally and hinder sustainable development strategies, including efforts to preserve national resources and the promotion of eco-tourism as a source of revenue for governments and local communities.

A major theme of the workshop was building capacities to dismantle the transnational illicit networks that poach and traffic wildlife and wildlife products. Like many other types of environmental crimes, poaching and wildlife trafficking are connected to transnational organized crime syndicates and dependent on institutionalized corruption and illicit financial flows. Other converging threats, such as narcotics trafficking and money laundering, involve the same criminal actors and make wildlife trafficking a growing concern for sustainable economic development and national security.

Approximately 150 Government officials, law enforcement personnel, and members of non-governmental and international conservation organizations from Central African, North American, and Asian countries, including China, worked together during the three-day workshop to share ideas and best practices for anti-poaching. U.S. Embassies in Libreville and Bangui and the Gabonese Government co-hosted the event with funding from the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. Leading the U.S. delegation was the State Department's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans, Environment and Science. The presence of both supply and demand countries emphasized the need for a regional response to strengthen international cooperation.

The workshop facilitated the exchange of information and shared best practices to foster and develop innovative responses to stem the poaching and cross-border trafficking of endangered and protected wildlife by involving agencies throughout governments. In addition, participants discussed ways to protect biodiversity through leveraging partnerships with other countries, non-governmental and international organizations from other regions to dismantle illicit networks. Participants committed to establishing a wildlife enforcement network to broaden anti-poaching efforts.

The workshop was successful in bringing together key law enforcement and government officials involved in combating wildlife trafficking. On the last day of the workshop, the Ministry of Water and Forests chaired an open discussion based upon a written draft resolution to validate, create and implement a regional wildlife enforcement network. From the planning discussion, the participants formulated ten recommendations to support establishing a regional wildlife enforcement network, enhance law enforcement efforts, and more fully implement international conventions against organized crime and corruption. The Gabonese Minister of Water and Forests endorsed the establishment of a regional anti-poaching network. Gabon plans to burn its ivory stockpiles as a follow-up activity in the coming months. All attendees agreed to enhance coordination between law enforcement authorities in source, transit, and destination states to tackle cross-border and transnational organized criminal activities.