



WWF

CAMPAIGN

2012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cameroon sends army to defend borders from Sudanese poachers

Yaoundé, Cameroon (16 November 2012) - Cameroon announced Friday it has mobilized its special forces units to prevent Sudanese poachers from entering its territory to hunt elephants for their ivory, in an operation it called “a first of its kind”. WWF congratulates the Cameroonian government for taking concrete steps to address poaching and illegal wildlife trade, a lucrative criminal activity that undermines the sovereignty, security and economic prospects of the Central African region.

According to information obtained by WWF, this is the same group of poachers that in early 2012 travelled more than 1,000 km on horseback from northern Sudan across the Central African Republic and Chad to [kill over 300 elephants](#) in the Bouba N’Djida National Park in northern Cameroon. This information says that the group had decided to return earlier than usual this year in order to take advantage of the greater ground cover available during the rainy season and to catch the park guards by surprise by arriving sooner than expected.

On Friday, high ranking officials of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), Cameroon’s special forces, told WWF that the high command had as a priority “the conservation and valorization of biodiversity, including the fight against cross-border poaching.”

“We are committed to avoid a repeat of the elephant massacre of early 2012,” a BIR official said. “We are already on the ground, we know the poachers are coming, and we have forces deployed in the reserves.”

“It is highly unfortunate that the military had to be called in to address this situation, but the reality is that we are dealing with well-armed and highly trained individuals, who do not hesitate to terrorize local populations to achieve their aims.”

“It should be noted that this is one of the top priority missions that the BIR is dealing with at this time, and the operational and logistical scale of this operation is the first of its kind,” the BIR representative said.

High demand for ivory coupled with porous borders and weak law enforcement capacity is seriously threatening the survival of elephants in the region. Although concrete numbers are hard to come by, it is estimated that the population of elephants in the Central African region was cut in half between 1995 and 2007, with the number of elephants killed still increasing.

“The elephant killings in Bouba N’Djida earlier this year put the crisis on the map. But over the past decades, poachers have already wiped elephants across large swaths of the Central African Republic,” according to Bas Huijbregts, head of policy on illegal wildlife trade for WWF Central Africa.

“The elephant population in the north-eastern parts of Central African Republic, which used to number around 35,000 in the seventies, has effectively been massacred, with only some 50 individuals remaining. And in neighboring Chad, in the Zakouma National Park, elephant

populations collapsed by 90 per cent compared to the levels that were recorded in 2006, with only 450 animals left in 2011,” Huijbregts explained.

“This is literally the last stand of elephants in these parts of Central Africa, and the operations of the Cameroonian Special Forces are indispensable to address this crisis,” Huijbregts added.

Ivory trade across borders is currently banned under international law. But rising income levels and increased demand in Asia, primarily China and Thailand, is pushing ivory prices to record levels, fuelling illicit trade.

“Poaching is a harmful practice on so many fronts. Besides endangering wildlife, it degrades fragile ecosystems, corrodes respect for the rule of law, and weakens national security. It threatens the livelihoods and economic growth opportunities of local communities. Any nation that turns a blind eye to poaching essentially invites transnational criminal organizations to operate freely, bringing with them a host of other related problems and tainting the country’s international standing,” said Greg Thorne, Chargé d’Affaires at the US Embassy in Cameroon.

“The United States applauds Cameroon’s announced efforts to combat and eliminate poaching. These efforts, once launched, will have numerous positive benefits, including preservation of natural patrimony, strengthening of law enforcement and border security, and reduction in crime,” he said.

Chad and the Central African Republic are collaborating with Cameroon to fight this poaching threat, and are currently in the process of finalizing a tri-national urgency action.

WWF is campaigning for greater protection of threatened species such as rhinos, tigers and elephants. In order to save endangered animals, source, transit and demand countries must all improve law enforcement, customs controls and judicial systems. WWF is also urging governments in consumer countries to undertake demand reduction efforts to curb the use of endangered species products.

###

For further information and media inquiries, please contact:

Jules CARON, WWF Central Africa

jcaron@wwfcarpo.org

+237 79 51 90 97

Luke ORTEGA, U.S. Embassy in Cameroon

ortegal2@state.gov

Photos: <https://photos.panda.org/gpn/external?albumId=4291>

Media broll: <http://gvn.panda.org/pages/view.php?ref=3451&k=833d7edfaa>

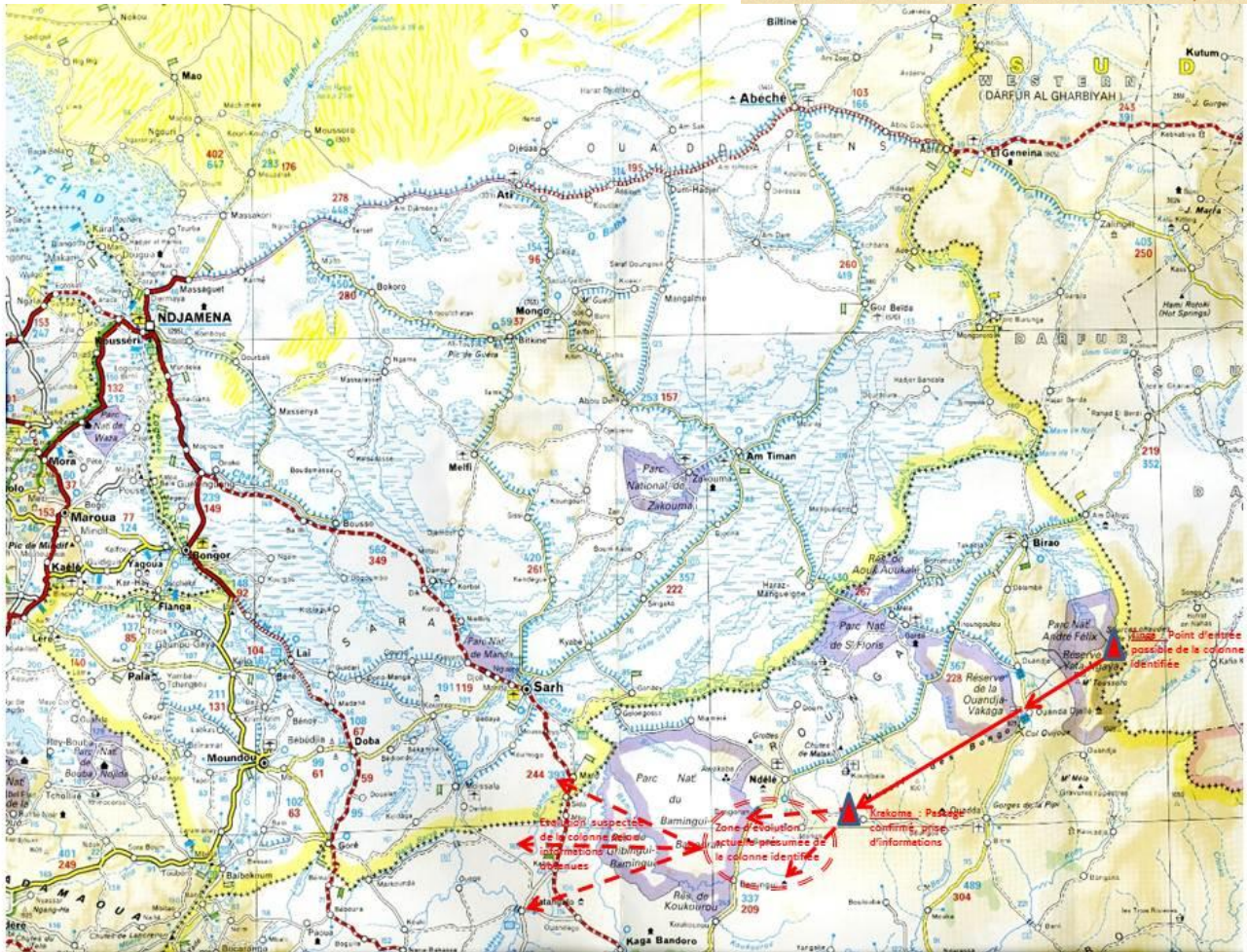
To learn more about WWF’s campaign visit panda.org/wildlifecrime and follow us on Twitter @WWF



**STOP WILDLIFE CRIME
JOIN THE FRONTLINE**

#killthetrade

Facebook.com/wwf



Map of the Central African Republic and borders to Cameroon and Chad, showing the probable path and possible destinations of poachers originating from North Sudan.