

End Wildlife Crime Initiative Statement of Purpose

Wildlife crime

Industrial scale, organised, transnational wildlife crime is shifting thousands of tonnes of contraband, worth billions of dollars, and leaving death, destruction, and instability in its wake. Yet, remarkably, there is no global legal agreement on wildlife crime. By default, we have turned to CITES, a trade-related conservation convention from the 1970's, to serve as the de facto legal instrument for combating serious wildlife crime. But CITES was not designed for this purpose; rather it was designed to regulate wildlife trade to avoid overexploitation of a species through international trade. It serves an important purpose in doing so, but it was not established and does not have the mandate to fight crime or the transnational organised criminal groups who are behind it. Of all the known threats to wildlife, illegal taking, trade and consumption is one of the most destructive and destabilising. We must finally grasp the nettle with wildlife crime, recognise the massive negative impacts it has on economies, ecosystems, public and animal health, security, and local communities, and embed combating it into the international criminal law framework.

Wildlife trade

Although the precise source of the Covid-19 pandemic has not yet been confirmed, the most likely explanation is that the virus jumped from bats to humans, perhaps via another animal such as a pangolin, at a wildlife market in China. However, the links between wildlife and previous epidemics and pandemics such as HIV-AIDS, Ebola, MERS, SARS and more, are well established. Scientists and public health officials have long advised of the risk posed by wildlife-related zoonotic diseases, and recognised the conditions that make spillover from animals to humans more likely, including through certain high-risk trade, markets and consumption. International trade in wildlife is regulated by CITES, but the Convention does not address public health or animal health issues in its decision making; it only considers overexploitation of a species through international trade. This narrow view of wildlife trade cannot be sustained in a post COVID-19 world, one that is now acutely aware of the massive damage that zoonotic pandemics can do to economies and societies across every continent. The global call to take a 'one health' approach to such issues to attain optimal health for people, animals and our environment, must be heeded.

Objectives of this Initiative

The Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime was created to address these serious gaps in the existing international legal framework for combating wildlife crime and regulating wildlife trade. The Initiative will advocate and offer technical support for the following reforms to international laws:

- creating a new global agreement on wildlife crime; and
- amending existing wildlife trade laws to include public health and animal health as part of the decision making process.

These two objectives will be advanced by advocating for the adoption a fourth wildlife crime

protocol under the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime; and through seeking amendments to CITES to include public and animal health criteria in the Convention's mandate. The two reforms, which are inter-related but not inter-dependent, would lead to possible new trade bans on health grounds and bans on certain high-risk markets and consumption, alongside a scaled up, cooperative global enforcement effort to combat wildlife crime.

Invitation to support this Initiative

The Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime is an informal alliance of a diverse range of organisations and individuals who support its objectives. It is hosted by the ADM Capital Foundation, is overseen by a small steering group, and has a technical support group. The Steering Group invites any organisations or individuals that support the objectives of 'End Wildlife Crime' to publicly express their support by signing onto the Initiative.