

Speech: Minister Mark Field's speech at the Wildlife Crime Reception, House of Commons

Introduction

Good afternoon and thank you to Zac Goldsmith for hosting us, and to International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) for giving me the opportunity to engage with you today.

As we all know, the spectre of wildlife poaching has been with us for decades – I remember hearing about the imminent danger to elephant and rhino populations almost 4 decades ago when I was still at school.

Effect of internet on IWT

What has really changed things and accelerated the urgency of the issue in recent years is the internet. Criminal networks caught on pretty quickly that they could harness the internet to create a marketplace that is not simply local or regional. It is global.

It means that the scale of the illegal trade in wildlife has really taken off. This criminality is now thought to be worth up to £17 billion a year. To give you an illustration of the scale of the slaughter – in just 7 years from 2007 to 2014, Savannah elephant populations are thought to have declined by almost a third.

That sad statistic alone equates to around 144,000 elephants – if they stood trunk to tail they would stretch from here to John O Groats! Or was it Land's End? Well, either way I think you get the point!. It is not just elephants – the illegal wildlife trade is decimating a huge range of species, from the pangolin, killed for medicine and food, to the gentle Sumatran orangutan, of which there are now fewer than 8,000 now left.

Baby orangutan are trapped to be kept as pets. Tragically, for each and every animal reaching market, as many as 5 other die in transit. These crimes not only threaten irreplaceable wildlife with extinction. They not only leave countries and communities bereft of the iconic animals that help define them, and that could sustain livelihoods long into the future.

This illegal trade also fuels, and is fuelled by, corruption. So these criminals are also undermining sustainable development, good governance and the rule of law. This is why it is so vital that we put a stop to the illegal wildlife trade, and close down the online marketplaces for illegal wildlife products.

UK action

This government is playing a leading role at home and on the international stage. Today, my colleague the Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, is introducing the [Ivory Bill in the House of Commons](#) – an important step in highlighting the UK's rejection of this horrible trade.

International action

We are also taking the fight to the poachers and traffickers. Over these past 4 years, the UK government has committed £26 million to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. The British military have provided tracker training for park rangers in key African states, and we have funded the expansion of INTERPOL's operations to track and intercept shipments of illegal wildlife products, including ivory and rhino horn.

The only way to really shut down illegal wildlife trade for good is for countries to work together, so we are also strengthening international partnerships.

IWT conference

In [2014 we hosted the ground-breaking London conference](#) that was praised as a turning point in global co-operation in this field. It secured ambitious agreements from more than 40 governments to take urgent, coordinated action.

To build on all this recent progress we are bringing the conference back to London this October. Please be assured we have even higher ambitions this time.

We will focus on 3 primary objectives:

- first – treating the illegal wildlife trade as a serious organised crime
- second – building coalitions of allies who share our aims
- finally – closing markets for illegal products

Closing online space

As the Adessium report makes clear: we urgently need to close down online marketplaces for illegal wildlife products. I commend IFAW, WWF and TRAFFIC for the progress they made bringing together an alliance of online companies in March to commit to an 80% reduction in the online sale of illegal wildlife products by 2020.

It is encouraging that over 20 companies, including big names like Ebay, Pinterest, Facebook and Microsoft have already signed up. I hope more will do so, and that this global initiative leads to the end of illegal wildlife sales online.

Innovations

I believe strongly that by working together, and by using the latest technology, we can – and we must – turn the tide on the illegal wildlife trade. Innovations like the ivory fingerprinting kit developed by Dr Leon Barron of King's College London, and Mark Moseley of the Metropolitan Police, will make a huge difference.

With this new technology, enforcement agencies will be able to capture better quality fingerprints from ivory and catch more of the culprits.

I congratulate Leon and Mark, both of whom are here today, on their innovation, and I am delighted to be able to announce that thanks to a generous donation from IFAW, we will be handing out kits to every country that attends the [illegal wildlife trade conference](#) in October.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, imagination, collaboration and commitment like this will help us stop the traffickers. It will not be quick or easy, but we have a range of committed individuals, organisations and governments alongside us.

Our October conference is a great chance to bolster our forces. I look forward to working with you in the lead up to it and beyond. There is no time to lose. Let's work together to stamp out this miserable, criminal trade.