

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

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STATUS, CONSERVATION AND TRADE IN AFRICAN AND ASIAN RHINOCEROSSES

The attached document has been prepared by IUCN, TRAFFIC and WWF\*, and submitted by the Secretariat.

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## **Status, conservation and trade in African and Asian rhinoceroses**

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### **An IUCN, TRAFFIC and WWF Briefing for the 58<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, Geneva, July 6-10, 2009**

At the 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP14) in June 2007, IUCN and TRAFFIC provided Parties with a report on the status, conservation and trade in African and Asian rhinoceroses. In addition, TRAFFIC provided a separate report on rhinoceros-related crimes in Africa, with an overview of poaching, seizure and stockpile data for the period 2000-2005. Both reports painted a rather bleak situation facing particular rhinoceros populations in parts of Africa, with sharp increases in the volume of rhinoceros horn entering illegal trade and poaching most severe in Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The CITES Parties at CoP14 responded by agreeing a series of decisions (i.e. Decisions 14.88-14.90) requiring range States to declare their stocks of rhinoceros horns and examine the implementation of Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP14) in particular range States where illegal poaching appears to have increased to the extent of posing a significant threat to populations of rhinoceroses, notably those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal and Zimbabwe. In addition, IUCN/SSC's African Rhino (AfRSG) and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups (AsRSG) and TRAFFIC are mandated by CITES Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP 14) to produce another report for the Secretariat on the status, conservation and trade of African and Asian Rhinoceroses prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in 2010 (CoP15).

#### **Rhinoceros poaching and trade since 2007**

Since CoP14, it is important to recognize that serious poaching in southern Africa has continued unabated. With support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and WWF, a meeting of the AfRSG was held in May 2008, which included the collection of data on continental rhinoceros numbers and trends, illegal killings and horn seizures and stockpiles up to the end of 2007. While overall numbers of white and black rhino have increased, it is of major concern that rhinoceros poaching in southern Africa increased substantially in 2008, with additional concerns relating to sport hunting of white rhinoceroses in South Africa. 2008 will probably represent the highest level of illegal rhinoceros killing in at least 15 years.

For example, in South Africa and Zimbabwe alone, a minimum total of 162 rhinoceroses were illegally killed in 2008 and another 62 have been poached during the first six months of 2009. Both of these figures may increase as further information becomes available. Comparing the 224 confirmed illegal rhinoceros deaths for these two rhinoceros range States alone, with the total of 252 illegal rhinoceros deaths for all African range States for the period 2000-2005 (as reported in TRAFFIC's report on rhino-related crimes in

Africa to CoP14), it is clear that there has been a serious escalation in illegal off-take. In summary, between 2000-2005, 3.5 rhinoceroses were illegally killed each month in all of Africa, but currently in South Africa and Zimbabwe alone, 12.4 rhinoceroses are being poached each month or between two and three rhinoceroses every week.

Illegal rhinoceros horn trade to destinations in Asia is driving this killing, with growing evidence of the ongoing involvement of Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai nationals in the illicit procurement and transport of rhinoceros horn out of Africa. For example, local media in South Africa have presented filmed evidence of the complicity of staff of the Viet Nam Embassy in South Africa in the procurement of illegal rhinoceros horns. Viet Nam was not a major destination for illegal commerce in rhinoceros horn until about five years ago. In that country, ongoing research is uncovering evidence that rhinoceros horns are currently being promoted for medical uses that greatly expand the scope of rhinoceros horn usage as described in the traditional literature, including using the substance to now treat a range of life threatening illnesses, particularly cancers. It is believed that rhinoceros horns illegally leaving southern Africa are moving into or through Thailand, Viet Nam and China, a situation which requires a heightened degree of law enforcement attention and effort.

With respect to Asian rhinoceros populations, a total of 48 rhinoceroses were killed due to poaching from 2005 to mid-2009, with more than 25 poachers apprehended in Nepal's Chitwan National Park alone. In Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) National Park, seven rhinos (out of a population of about 68) were killed due to poaching in 2008, with four rhino already killed by poachers this year. Since January 2009, 10 rhinoceroses have been poached in Assam, India and seven in Nepal. Since carcass detection is always lower than actual numbers in these forested and tall grassland habitats, these figures represent minimum losses. Funds have been provided by TRAFFIC-India to help the government in Assam deal with the issue of rhinoceros poaching. These funds have been used to support anti-poaching activities, undertake trade monitoring, establish informant networks, and conduct seizures. These efforts have resulted in numerous arrests by government authorities, including seizures of rhinoceros horns, ivory, leopard skins, and weapons. In Nepal, WWF has provided funding for anti-poaching and enforcement efforts as well. Funding for these government efforts in anti-poaching, enforcement, and trade work is needed to continue these needed actions. Chinese enforcement authorities could also assist by cooperating with range States, as one of the known trade routes for rhinoceros horn is via Tibet.

## **South Africa**

South Africa is the source of most horns leaving Africa, and the current trade involves rhinoceros horns from neighbouring countries, including Zimbabwe and Mozambique. An increasing proportion of horns entering illegal trade have come from poached rhinoceroses, as well as through abuse of trophy-hunted white rhinoceroses and domestic acquisition of horns from the private sector. In June 2009, an armed robbery occurred at a government store within Addo National Park, indicating a further escalation in tactics and modus operandi of illegal horn traders. At the same time, it is worth noting that a number of positive actions have been taken by the South African government, including the introduction of Threatened or Protected Species Regulations under the country's National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, a moratorium on internal rhino horn sales, the imposition of a strengthened control framework for the country's sport hunting policy for white rhinoceros in February 2009 (including limiting each hunter to only one rhino a year); and a series of arrests of individuals engaged in illicit rhinoceros killing and trade. In fact, South Africa's law enforcement should be commended for their focused and innovative attention to this serious conservation challenge.

Additional measures, however, are needed, such as the implementation of a precautionary annual national white rhinoceros hunting quota (whether it involves foreign nationals or local citizens), so that all hunts can be tracked within an accountable and transparent system irrespective of whether or not application is being made to export the trophies. South Africa should also be encouraged to implement tighter controls on the issuance of rhinoceros horn trophy export permits and establish a policy whereby sport-hunted trophies are only allowed to be exported to countries which have policies in place to register and track the ownership of such trophies and otherwise ensure that they will not be used for commercial purposes. Nationals from any country failing to demonstrate such policies should be precluded from engaging in sport hunting of rhinoceros in South Africa.

## **Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, the proportion of mortalities due to illegal killing has been alarmingly high with 79% of recorded black and white rhinoceros mortalities from January 2003 to June 2006 being attributed to poaching and snaring. Rhinoceros numbers in Zimbabwe are declining, with official statistics supplied to the AfRSG indicating that black rhinoceros numbers declined slightly from the end of 2005 to the end of 2007. As part of the CITES reporting process pursuant to Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP14), IUCN/SSC AfRSG is working together with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority to review numbers and trends. Indications are that both white and black rhinoceros numbers have continued to decline through 2008, and the implication of this is that poaching losses are likely to have been higher than originally thought, assuming a conservative net underlying annual population growth rate including natural mortalities since 2002. Recorded losses in the Lowveld Conservancies alone over this period number 70 rhinoceroses and reported losses have also been high in the Midlands.

In its report to CoP14, TRAFFIC showed that the rate for illegal rhinoceros horn recovery in Zimbabwe from 2000-2005 was  $\leq 13\%$ . This was very low compared with other range States. TRAFFIC also noted that Zimbabwe was (along with South Africa) the African range State with the greatest estimated net minimum flow of illegal horns out of the country over the period 2000-2005 and the situation has not improved since then.

This picture of increasing poaching, declining numbers and low levels of effective law enforcement by the Zimbabwean authorities increasingly threatens the success of more than a decade's work of bringing rhinoceros populations in Zimbabwe back up to healthy levels. It is therefore critical that the increased poaching is effectively countered. The relevant Zimbabwean authorities urgently need to review the status and security of rhinoceroses in Zimbabwe and establish the current situation with regard to poaching levels; law enforcement effectiveness; prosecution success; illegal trade levels; the status and trends in Zimbabwe rhinoceros numbers; and the probable impact of poaching on individual rhinoceros populations and the country's overall population through demographic analysis.

With primarily WWF support and some funding from the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), IUCN/SSC AfRSG and TRAFFIC are involved in a process working with the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority to review rhinoceros monitoring, numbers and trends and rhinoceros law enforcement issues as part of the CITES mandated CoP15 reporting process, and as part of the process of revising the Zimbabwe National Rhino Strategy. To date, IUCN/SSC AfRSG and TRAFFIC have received exemplary cooperation from the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority in this regard. This work is in progress and the results will be reported on at CoP15. Monitoring training and equipment needs have also been determined for a number of parks by the IUCN/SSC AfRSG Scientific Officer and the Zimbabwe National Rhino Coordinator and a proposal to commence necessary training is being drafted.

### **Progress on implementation of Decisions 14.88 and 14:89**

Decision 14.88 calls upon all African and Asian rhinoceros range States and Parties that have stocks of rhinoceros horns or rhinoceros horn derivatives to declare the status of their stocks before CoP15 in accordance with a format to be circulated by the Secretariat. Decision 14.89 further instructs that the IUCN/SSC African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups and TRAFFIC assist in the development of the format for the rhinoceros horn stock declarations. It can be reported that IUCN and TRAFFIC have duly collaborated with the CITES Secretariat to produce this reporting format, which was circulated to all Parties in No.2009/011 of 20 March 2009.

Decision 14.89 further invites TRAFFIC to review information on rhinoceros horn stocks in range States; to assess the trade routes by which horns enter and flow to illegal markets; to identify priority countries in which there has been a recent significant increase in poaching levels, where discrepancies exist in reported horn stockpiles, where volumes of horn stockpiles are unknown or where insufficient cross border collaboration to combat illegal rhinoceros horn trade has been reported in their reporting to the Secretariat pursuant to Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP14) for consideration at CoP15. It should be noted that at the

time of this writing, only five Parties (China, Germany, Japan, New Zealand and the United Kingdom) have submitted rhinoceros horn stock declarations to the CITES Secretariat for transmission to TRAFFIC. It is worth noting that no rhinoceros range States in either Africa or Asia have yet complied with this decision.

#### **Progress on the mandate in CITES Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP 14) to IUCN and TRAFFIC**

With funding generously provided by WWF, IUCN and TRAFFIC have begun initial work gathering data and information from a variety of sources on the trade in South Africa, including permits issued for legal export of trophies and information on trade to Asia. A workshop has been conducted in Zimbabwe in preparation for the analysis to be conducted by IUCN and TRAFFIC as mandated under CITES Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP 14).

However, additional funding for the work called for in CITES Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP 14), (and in particular for the preparation of the summary report for CoP15 and analyses and collation of horn stockpile data) has not been forthcoming from any other sources apart from support received for conducting the 2008 AfRSG meeting from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and WWF, a small grant to the IUCN/SSC AfRSG from the IRF towards the cost of mandated reporting to CoP15, and the WWF/IRF support to assist IUCN/SSC AfRSG and TRAFFIC undertake their work with Zimbabwe Authorities. IUCN and TRAFFIC would like to thank the CITES Secretariat for issuing the call for support for this work in March 2009, and would encourage potential donors to respond to this call. In light of the alarmingly dire situation that many rhinoceros populations are facing, it is critical that Parties at CoP15 are provided with an accurate and up-to-date picture of the status, conservation and trade in African and Asian rhinoceroses, as well as the factors driving the consumption of rhinoceros horn, so that firm international action can be taken to arrest this immediate threat to rhinoceros populations worldwide.