

Central and West Africa Wildlife Law Enforcement Network

Monthly Regional Wildlife Law Enforcement Briefing – January 2014

Summary

This month was marked by the dismantling of a big ivory network in Togo arresting 3 traffickers including a Vietnamese and seizing 3815.75 kg of ivory (almost 4 tons). Still in Togo, 7 other major traffickers were arrested with different wildlife products including more than 20 felid skins, more than 15 felid heads, elephant and gorilla parts.

Operations were carried out in other projects - in Cameroon, 4 dealers arrested with ivory in Lomie – East; in Congo, a trafficker was arrested with a leopard skin in Brazzaville; in Gabon, 7 ivory traffickers were arrested in 3 different operations including a Cameroon national, and 1 illegal timber exploiter also arrested.

LAGA Director and Coordinator of the EAGLE Network survives an attack by a 3 meter long crocodile while on nature trip in the tribal woodlands of Ethiopia's Omo River banks. He is presently taking treatment in Israel.

Good prosecutions were obtained in Gabon sentencing a major and influential ivory dealer who was arrested in Libreville with 34kg of elephant tusks. He was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment and to pay 200,000 FCFA (about \$400) as fine and 1 million FCFA (about \$2,000) as damages. In Togo, 2 dealers in wildlife products were sentenced to 20 months and 24 months of imprisonment and to individually pay damages of 6 billion FCFA (about \$2 millions).

Cases of corruption, bribery attempts and lack of collaboration were observed again this month. In Cameroon, following the arrest of a Chinese dealer in chimp in Douala, MINFOF Littoral Regional Delegation refused to sign the PV (complaint report) already signed by the Chinese and to duly channel the case to court according to procedure. The chimp supposedly came from a General in the Cameroon army and a call from him to MINFOF ensured that the appropriate measures against a wildlife criminal were not followed.

In Guinea, a major trafficker who was arrested and confessed to have illegally sold more than 500 chimpanzees was unprocedurally released by a substitute of the State Prosecutor of the Appeal Court. His release was denounced via national and international media.

CAMEROON – LAGA

- LAGA Director survives a crocodile attack while on nature trip in the tribal woodlands of Ethiopia's Omo River banks. He was attacked by a 3-meter crocodile that charged at his canoe and locked its jaw on his leg chopping off part of his calf. He is presently receiving treatment and recovering in Israel after getting initial treatment in Ethiopia.
- A Chinese national also the manager of a restaurant in Douala was arrested with a chimp he claims was given to him and his sister by a General in the Cameroon army. Here again, traffic of influence, lack of collaboration and breach of procedure by MINFOF was observed. The General supposedly called MINFOF and the MINFOF Delegate with the Chief of Wildlife of the Littoral Regional Delegation refused to sign the PV which the suspect had signed and forward it to the State Counsel as procedure demands. The chimp was rescued after overcoming many obstacles and taken to the Limbe Wildlife Center.
- A network of elephant poachers and ivory traffickers dismantled in Lomie – East following the arrest of 4 members with elephant tusks and elephant meat. One of the members, a well-

known poacher and a recidivist popularly called "Samedi" confessed on record to have killed 12 elephants for the past couple of months mostly in the Nki National Park. Another member of the network tried to bribe the arresting team for their release. They supply 2 major traffickers in Lomie and investigations are still ongoing to arrest them. The operation was carried out with the MINFOF - Djomedjo Chief of Post and Lomie Delegation.

- The 2013 LAGA Annual Report on activity and finance promptly completed, sent to the various donors and posted on the LAGA website. The link to the report is http://www.laga-enforcement.org/Portals/0/Documents/Activity%20reports%202013/LAGA_Annual_Report%202013.pdf

Action needed:

- Letter to the Minister – MINFOF reiterating the lack of collaboration and breach of procedure concerning many wildlife cases since the beginning of 2013

CONGO – PALF

- 1 well known trafficker arrested in Brazzaville with a leopard skin while trying to illegally trade in it.
- First sentence of a wildlife trafficker in Dolisie Court
- Media pieces released in northern Congo

Action needed:

- Brazzaville Court has been slow to move forward wildlife cases because of the violence in Brazzaville in December, but needs to speed up – promoting the Rule of Law is paramount, for smaller cases like the recent leopard skin dealer arrested, and even more so for ground-breaking cases like the Ebana/Ikolongo trial
- Support to the Direction General de l'Économie Forestière and to the Direction Départementale de l'Économie Forestière du Niari for the recent efforts in Dolisie and the prosecution of a wildlife criminal in Court

GABON – AALF

- In Mekambo, a network of 5 ivory traffickers were arrested for illegal ivory trade. In their complaint reports, they made mention on PV of the involvement of a Brigade Commander and an Agent of the General Office of Documentation.
- A major and influential ivory dealer was arrested in Libreville with 34kg of elephant tusks that he was illegally possessing and trying to trade in. He was later judged in flagrant delicto and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment and to pay 200,000 FCFA (about \$400) as fine and 1 million FCFA (about \$2,000) as damages.
- In Franceville, a Cameroon national also an ivory trafficker was arrested with 2 elephant tusks. Ivory trade between Gabon and Cameroon is well documented and many Cameroonians are known to drive this illegal trade between the 2 countries and other countries in the sub-region.
- In Douala – Mitzic, a forest exploiter was arrested for the illegal exploitation of timber and with no permit.

Action needed:

- Letter of Congratulations to the authorities of the Judicial Police for their assistance in arrest operations.

GUINEA – CONAKRY-GALF

- A former CITES Management Authority for Guinea, Ansoumane Doumbouya was auditioned by the Interpol – NCB and GALF on his role played in the illegal exportation of bonobos to Armenia.
- Investigations are ongoing to track down Ousmane Diallo following the issuance of an arrest warrant for him by the Court of Appeal. Diallo, a major trafficker who was arrested and confessed to have illegally sold more than 500 chimpanzees was unprocedurally released by a substitute of the State Prosecutor of the Appeal Court. His release was denounced via national and international media.

Action Needed

- Letter of congratulation to Interpol NCB – Guinea, Custom Authorities and the Minister for Security for their collaboration in arresting wildlife dealers.

TOGO – TALFF

- 3 international and major ivory traffickers including a Vietnamese and 2 Togolese were arrested at the port of Lome trying to send out a container with almost 4 tons of elephant tusks (3815.75 kg). The operation was carried out with ‘OFFFICE’ and other government institutions. This arrest comes as a result intense investigations geared at climbing the trafficking chain and arrest other members of the international wildlife trafficking syndicate. Following the arrest of an international ivory trafficker with 700 kg of ivory in his home and his shop; post arrest investigations revealed that he had 4 bank accounts and sits on the board of one of the banks, just one look into the smaller account showed a 70,000 USD transaction with his phone book giving hundreds of valuable contacts as - "Chinese ivory buyer", "rhino horn seller, Vietnam" etc.
- In other operations, 7 people including a Benin national were arrested with a variety of wildlife products in Lome while trying in them; there were arrested with 15 leopard skins, 7 lion skins, 2 gorilla skins, 14 sea turtle shells, 10 leopard heads, 5 lion heads, elephant parts and other primate parts.
- 2 dealers in wildlife products were sentenced to 20 months and 24 months of imprisonment and to individually pay damages of 6 billion FCFA (about \$2 millions).
- Cases of arrested dealers especially international dealers continued to be followed-up in court.

Action needed:

- Letter of Congratulation to the Ministry of Security and “Office” for their collaboration and role in assisting in the arrest of major wildlife dealers.
- Letter of Congratulations to the Ministry of Justice for the good court sentences.

C.A.R – RALF

- Because of security problems in that country, no veritable activity was undertaken. This situation may continue for the next couple of months.

CHAD

- A LAGA Legal Adviser who travelled to Chad in order to meet the authorities pertaining to the replication of LAGA activities in that country and to follow up cases initiated last year that are pending at the level of courts continues to follow-p these activities from Cameroon.

Action needed

- Letter of Recommendation to the Minister in charge of wildlife in Chad on immediate start of the replication of LAGA activities in that country.

The Central Africa Wildlife Law Enforcement Network

The Central Africa Wildlife Law Enforcement Network is a collaboration created by the first wildlife law enforcement NGO in Africa and its replications in the region, fighting corruption to get the wildlife law applied.

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