

## Wildlife in danger of extinction

We celebrate today for the first time the World's Wildlife Day, acknowledging the beauty of the world's wild fauna and flora and also aware that wildlife is essential for sustainable development and human well being. But at the same time, we are witnessing a dramatic spike in international wildlife trafficking.

Tens of thousands of elephants are killed every year for their ivory, more than one thousand rhinos were slaughtered last year for their horns, tigers are poached for their skins and bones, bears for their paws and bile, sharks for their fins, while live birds and reptiles are feeding the black market for the pet trade.

And it is not only about exotic species. Even within the European Union, birds are illegally killed on a massive scale and endangered species like eels are smuggled to Asia.

The EU is part of this global problem, and we want to be sure that it is a leader in finding global solutions. The European Union is an important market for wildlife products (for example tropical timber, reptiles or caviar) that are subject to important levels of illegal trade.

The EU is also a transit route used by wildlife criminals. Every week, customs and police officers seize products as varied as rhino horns, ivory items, pangolin scales, dried seahorses, live chameleons at European ports and airports.

Wildlife trafficking has become a new business for transnational organised crime networks, just as drugs or weapons trafficking. They operate everywhere, including in the EU. Last year for example, the Czech authorities arrested 16 people who were part of a sophisticated international criminal ring specialised in smuggling rhino horn from South Africa to Vietnam. Another gang has been robbing more than 50 of such horns all across European museum and antique shops.

The consequences of wildlife trafficking are disastrous: if poaching levels in Africa continue as they do currently, some of the oldest and most beautiful creatures on earth may disappear. And we must not forget that wildlife trafficking is also a theft of natural resources from the local communities living with those species, it feeds corruption and in some cases undermines the political stability of entire fragile regions like in Central Africa.

The EU has always been leading actions, both domestically and globally, for the protection of the environment, good governance and against organised crime. The EU is uniquely placed to address the new dimension of wildlife trafficking, using its leverage as a main actor in trade, diplomacy and development cooperation. And we will have to do more. Therefore, the European Commission has just launched a wide [consultation on the EU approach to wildlife trafficking](#). We welcome the views of all citizens to help the EU stepping up its action against wildlife trafficking. A strong mobilisation of the European civil society can make a huge difference in our combat against this crime. And halting wildlife trafficking is an absolute necessity if we want our children still to be able to celebrate World Wildlife Day on 3rd March.