



AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION®

## AWF Position Statement: Elephant Ivory Stockpiles and the Ivory Trade

13 November 2013

### ***Position:***

African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) urges all African elephant range States and the international community to take a firm position with regard to protecting Africa's elephants and to put in place stringent measures that will extinguish the insatiable demand threatening the survival of the world's largest land mammal. AWF strongly recommends that (1) all ivory stockpiles be destroyed, and (2) a domestic moratorium on ivory trade be established within each country without delay. These actions eliminate the possibility of an ivory marketplace, remove the economic incentives that are driving poaching, and prevent illegal ivory from being trafficked under the cover of a legalised trade. These strong steps send a clear message that trafficking of ivory will not be tolerated and will allow Africa's elephant populations to stabilize and recover.

### ***The Issue:***

The African elephant is important as a cultural and political symbol in many African countries and plays a critical role in the ecosystem as a keystone species and in the economy as a tourist attraction. In spite of this, the African elephant, *Loxodonta africana*, now faces unprecedented illegal killing—the highest since before the 1989 ban on the international trade in ivory. Escalating poaching, fuelled by growing demand for ivory, is reversing any gains in elephant conservation and threatens the species' long-term survival across its range. Seizures of illegal ivory have grown in spite of overall increased protection measures *in situ*. The availability of ivory in stores acquired from naturally deceased elephants or from confiscated ivory has direct linkages to growing demand, thus enabling the illegal trade. The stockpiles along with the legality of the ivory trade in some countries creates ambiguity and doubt, and makes law enforcement and the differentiation between legal and illegal ivory almost impossible. These conditions create the impression that ivory is a legitimate commodity to be traded, held and speculated on, and which will hold or increase in value over the long term.

Destroying stockpiles and outlawing all ivory trade sends the opposite signal to the market, that ivory is not a tradable commodity and will not be for the foreseeable future. AWF's position will help close national and international ivory markets quickly.

Stockpiling ivory and allowing conditional ivory trade in some countries promotes several harmful trends. Ivory has been stolen in some range States because stockpiles are not well secured, a trend expected to continue as stockpiles expand with time. Stockpiles are not well documented, and, when combined with a conditional legalised ivory trade in some countries, enhances the possibility for trafficking. Additionally, the cost of protecting stockpiles and DNA profiling is extremely expensive. Many range States lack the capacity or willingness to safeguard ivory within their possession, while

States with a legalised ivory trade lack the capacity or willingness to ensure that only legal ivory is being traded.

With the ban in trade in ivory, retaining stockpiles of ivory in countries with CITES Appendix I-listed populations is economically meaningless, yet it creates the potential for illicit movement and unauthorized trade. Evidence from criminal investigations and anti-smuggling efforts has shown that the legal ivory trade can, and does, serve as a cover for illegal trade. Furthermore, so long as demand for ivory exists, protected area authorities will be placed under increasing pressure and danger to safeguard remaining elephants.

AWF notes that international legal ivory trade regulated by CITES has been on hold until certain conditions are met and to allow elephant populations to recover. However, neither the international ivory trade nor the domestic ivory trade has been well regulated. Hence, with regard to stemming demand, AWF urges each country to enact its own domestic moratorium on ivory trade. Destroying stockpiles now and eliminating ivory sales within countries reinforces the CITES moratorium and galvanises public support for elephant conservation. Ivory stockpiles have already been destroyed in the Philippines, Kenya, Zambia and Gabon, and an ivory crush is planned for the United States.

AWF does not consider it appropriate to consider any further ivory sales. AWF recognises that some range States, particularly in southern Africa, have invested in elephant conservation with positive results. Given the current crisis, however, we urge these countries to make a necessary sacrifice and assist in shutting down the market to ensure African elephant conservation across *all* range States.

#### ***Overall Population Status of African Elephants:***

Between the 1970s and 1990 many elephants were killed, leaving an estimated population of 300,000 – 600,000. The 2007 continental analysis estimated the total elephant population to be between 470,000 and 690,000 due to recovery in Southern and East Africa. Current estimates range between 419,000 and 650,000, predominantly in Southern (about 39 percent) and East (about 26 percent) Africa. Botswana, Tanzania and Zimbabwe account for more than half of Africa's elephants.<sup>1</sup>

The long-term survival of the elephant is now in question across much of its range. The elephant population has seriously declined in the 37 current range States. Poaching levels across all African sub-regions have been on the increase since 2006, with an all-time high in 2011 and 2012 when about 25,000 elephants were poached. While populations in Southern Africa remain largely stable, those in East, Central and West Africa have declined, with the highest recent declines directly related to poaching. Forest elephant numbers have decreased by about 62 percent across Central Africa between 2002 and 2011.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> IUCN. 2013. Elephant Database. <http://www.elephantdatabase.org/> (accessed February, 2013)

<sup>2</sup> Maisels F, Strindberg S, Blake S, Wittemyer G, Hart J, et al. (2013) Devastating Decline of Forest Elephants in Central Africa. PLoS ONE 8(3): e59469. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0059469