



UNEP

AGENDA ITEM:

Illegal Wildlife Trade and It's Impacts on the Amazonian Region

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Agenda Item: Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade and Its Impacts on the Amazon Region

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1. Letter From the Secretary General

Most Esteemed Participants of Neriman Erol Yılmaz Social Sciences High School Model
United Nations Conference, on behalf of myself and of other members of the Executive
Team,

My name is Yasemin Raithel, I am a senior graduating from Private Açı Science College. It is my great honor and pleasure to be serving as the Secretary-General of this fabulous conference. Model United Nations conferences are not just a place where diplomatic views are discussed; they are events that provide you with the ability to fully express yourself in critical situations, giving speeches in a confident way in multi-person committees, bringing solutions to problems from the perspective of countries, and many other skills like these. That's why these conferences are like an open door for you to improve yourself. Step out of your comfort zone and don't miss this opportunity. I have no doubt that your experience will be the best you have had in a long time.

Both our academic and organisation teams have dedicated limitless hours and put so much work to deliver to the whole Antalya Model United Nations Society one of the most incredible MUN experience you have seen to this day. Last but not least, let this be a new beginning, as befits the motto of the conference: The Dawn of the Moon. Lastly, I would like to leave a quote with hopes of a marvellous conference;

“Men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”

-Aristotle

Sincerely,

Yasemin RAITHEL

Secretary-General of NEYMUN'25

2. Letter From the Under Secretary General

Esteemed participants of this committee,

I would like to welcome you all to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) committee of NEYMUN'25. I will be serving as your Under-Secretary General during the long awaited three days of this prestigious conference. Thanks to our dear Executive Team's hard work and commitment to this conference, we are able to gather in this committee.

I would like to extend my gratitudes to my dearest Academic Assistant, Kuzey Karlık for accepting my invitation and helping me throughout the preparation of our committee . I am indeed very grateful that I was and will be able to work with him in this committee.

As this committee and conference is marking an end to my MUN journey, I am both very grateful and emotional about the whole process. I am hoping from the bottom of my heart that this committee will be an extremely productive, pleasing and a very memorable experience for all of us because it will be for me.

Our Agenda Item is Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade and Its Impacts on the Amazon Region. You will be debating upon the reasons, methods and causes of the illegal wildlife trade. We are expecting you to create solutions related to the topics you discussed upon, collaborate with your fellow delegates and elaborate your ideas to create an efficient Resolution Paper.

Besides reading this Study Guide, we are expecting you to further research upon our topic and be prepared. Your research may contain information about your country's status, international actions and possible solutions for the issue.

You may contact me with any inquiries via email.

umitgozde23@gmail.com

Best Regards,

Gözde Ümit, Under Secretary General of UNEP

3. Letter from the Academic Assistant

Dear Delegates,

I would like to welcome you all to the UNEP committee! I am Kuzey Karlık and it is my utmost pleasure to serve you as the Academic Assistant of this committee.

First, I would like to thank the executive team for granting me this opportunity in this marvelous conference. And I would like to thank my Under Secretary General Gözde, for supporting me all the way through.

The study guide we wrote contains crucial information for this committee. Yet as its name states it's only a guide for you, so I am highly encouraging you to do your research both about the topic and your country allocation and don't forget to answer the questions in the questions to be addressed part.

I am sure this committee will be a blast, and I am looking forward to meeting you all on 19-21 August. If you have any questions you can always contact me through mail.

Sincerely,

Kuzey, Academic Assistant of UNEP.

kuzeykarlik@gmail.com

4. Introductions

4.1. Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is an international entity whose mandate is to promote sustainable development and prudent use of the global environment. It assists many countries to achieve resilient, low-emission pathways through its flagship programmes in adaptation, forestry, energy efficiency and transition to sustainable development. Its key activities include promoting investment in clean technologies in order to reduce emissions, protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, alleviating poverty, and ecosystem-based adaptation in order to reduce human vulnerability and strengthen resilience to the impacts of climate change. It works with the financial communities to mobilize financial resources for investments in low carbon and climate resilient development; developing climate finance readiness and capacity-building; and undertaking policy and research analysis. The climate change portfolio of UNEP has a total volume of over US\$ 400 million.

The rising pollution levels of the 1960s and 1970s prompted the international leadership to think about having laws and regulations in place for environmental concerns, along with the likes of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), etc.

These concerns were addressed at the 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Environment (also known as the Stockholm Conference). The Conference led to the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration (Declaration on the Human Environment).

The Conference also resulted in the formation of a management body for these concerns, which was later called the United Nations Environment Programme. Headquartered in Nairobi, the UNEP is headed by an Executive Director.

UNEP has a variety of work areas and projects they are engaged with.

Which include:

- Developing global conventions on the environment and related issues, hosting the secretariats of various conventions such as: Minamata Convention, United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Basel Convention, Stockholm Convention, Rotterdam Convention, Montreal Protocol, Vienna Convention, Convention on Migratory Species, Tehran Convention, Bamako Convention, Carpathian Convention, Climate & Clean Air Coalition (CCAC).
- Promoting environmental science and related information.
- Financing and implements developmental projects related to the environment.
- Engaging with national governments, NGOs, etc. in relation to environmental policy and implementation.
- Formulating treaties and guidelines in the domain of international trade in harmful chemicals, international waterways pollution and transboundary pollution of air.
- Awarding and honouring individuals as well as institutions that do stellar work in this field.

4.2. Introduction to the Agenda Item

4.2.1 Overview of the Amazonian Region

The Amazon region encompasses the entire east - central area of South America, to the east of the Andean Cordillera and from the Guyana Shield in the north to the Brazilian highlands in the south. Its elevation ranges from 4,000 meters, in the western Cordillera, to sea level. It has an area of more than 7.8 million km², 4% of the South American continent, and includes portions of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela.

The region itself is quite complex, as its watershed encompasses eight different countries, with different proportions of jungle territory, including: Brazil, with 61.8%, Peru with 11.4%, Bolivia (8.1%), Suriname (5.6%), Colombia (6%), as well as Venezuela (6.73%), Guyana (2.6%), Ecuador (1.7%) and the overseas department of French Guiana with 1.1%. It is a vast area inhabited by more than 40 million people, including some 410 indigenous groups with diverse languages and cultures.

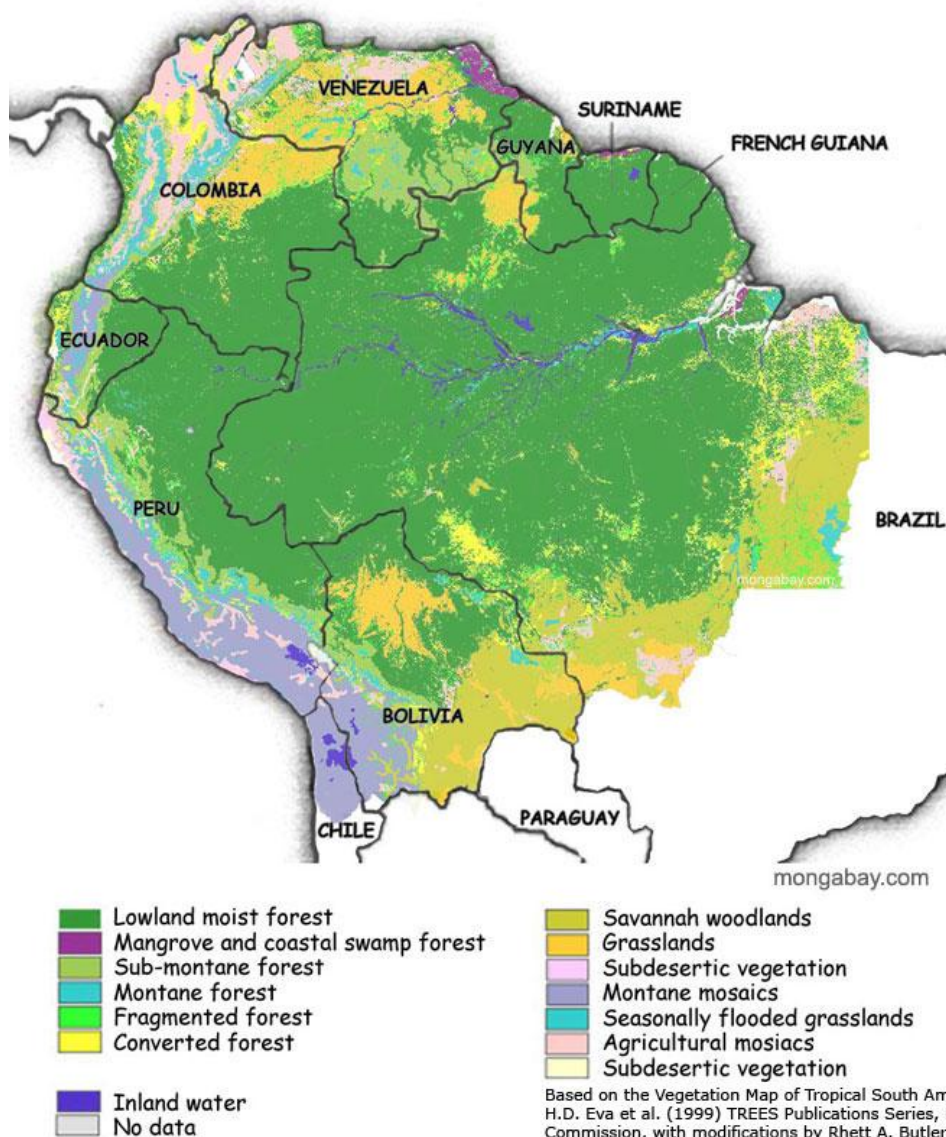
The Amazon is more than half of the world's tropical rainforest and it is the world's largest tropical forest. The region represents between 4 and 6% of the earth's total surface and between 25 and 40% of the surface of America. The Amazon is also a synonym of cultural diversity, which is the result of a historical process of land occupation and interaction among different ethnic and geographical origin groups.

The Amazonian Hydrological Cycle feeds a complex system of aquifers and groundwater, which can cover nearly 4 million square kilometers among Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.

The Amazon is home to a variety of flora and fauna thereby allowing global brands of biodiversity to be set. It is also an important endemic area and is therefore a genetic reserve of global importance for the development of mankind.



The enormous wealth of the Amazon region has allowed the survival and development of unique forms of life. The biodiversity of its ecosystems is enormous and these provide habitat to more than 30,000 species of plants, approximately 2,000 species of fish, 60 species of reptiles, 35 families of mammals, and approximately 1,800 species of birds. More than 16% of all the world's fresh water drains through the Amazon Basin, with an average flow in excess of 175,000 m³ per second. The area is characterized by heavy precipitation and is mostly covered with tropical rainforest. The Amazonian forests account for more than 56% of the world's broad - leafed forests. Approximately 3% of the area of the region, or nearly 22 million, has been set aside as national parks and protected areas by the governments of the Amazon countries.



The Amazon is of vital importance because people around the world, as well as locally, depend on the rainforest. Not just for food, water, wood and medicines, but to help stabilise the climate—150-200 billion tons of carbon is stored in the Amazon rainforest. The trees in the Amazon also release 20 billion tonnes of water into the atmosphere per day, playing a critical role in global and regional carbon and water cycles. (WWF, 2024)

Even though the region plays a crucial role in many areas varying from biodiversity to regulating climate, it is under a massive threat. The region's average temperature has increased by 2 degrees celsius since the 1960's. Leading to a drier climate thus leaving the region open for forest fires among many issues. There are also a vast amount of human activities that put the wildlife and ecosystem of the Amazon including oil exploration, mining, cattle ranching and agriculture, heavy infrastructure development, illegal logging, poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

4.2.2. What is Illegal Wildlife Trade and What are its Impacts?

Illegal wildlife trade (IWT) belongs to the so-called green crimes or environmental crimes, which are defined as “illegal activities harming the environment and aimed at benefitting individuals or groups or companies from the exploitation of, damage to, trade or theft of natural resources“. IWT encompasses obtaining, capturing, poaching, smuggling, importing, exporting, processing, possessing, collecting, and consumption of wild flora, fauna, and fungal, aquatic or terrestrial, dead or alive, including derivatives, parts, and products thereof, which are regulated or protected by national and/or international laws. It is considered among the most profitable illegal industries in the world, with an estimated annual value of 7–23 billion USD in 2013..

Organised Crime Groups use their networks to smuggle wildlife products and launder criminal proceeds, often using the same methods and techniques used in drugs, human and arms trafficking. It is also the fourth biggest criminal activity worldwide behind only the trafficking of the three mentioned goods.

IWT not only destroys the planet's biodiversity but it has a negative impact on economic and social development, affecting the livelihoods of communities that depend on wildlife. It undermines the rule of law, fosters corruption and creates huge criminal profits through other forms of serious organised crimes. Most of these vast profits are then laundered through global financial systems, using well-developed trade infrastructures with strong integration into the global economy, exploiting weaknesses in the financial and non-financial sectors.

The level of sophistication in illegal trade makes the extensive involvement of organized crime evident. This includes the transition to internet markets, the vast amount of seized shipments, and the co-opting of legal trade markets into the criminal supply chain, all indicating a high level of organization. While some products are entirely illegal, such as rhino horns, for which trade is prohibited, some still enter legal marketplaces. Timber, for instance, is frequently fed into legal industries where its illegal origin is obscured, especially as wood illegally harvested in one country may be legal to import into another. These wildlife products are processed and sold as legal commodities, providing traffickers access to a far wider array of potential buyers.

Wildlife crime also involves corrupt officials at all levels, who enable illicit wildlife trade at sourcing, transit, and export stages. Corruption underpins the illegal trade in natural resources, nurtured by the vast profits made by various organizations from this criminal activity. It enables perpetrators to carry out their crimes with impunity, thereby contributing to the thriving of this criminal activity. For instance, an estimated US\$18,000 to \$30,000 in bribes were given to border officials per day to allow ivory to cross the Vietnam-China border illicitly.

Wildlife crime converges with other illicit activities, being perpetrated alongside corruption, tax evasion, fraud, money laundering and arms trafficking. Criminals operate along the entire supply chain, exploiting institutional and legislative loopholes. Combined with porous borders and ineffective customs procedures, these regulatory weaknesses contribute to the fact that poaching and trafficking of protected species by criminal organizations across borders continue unabated today.

5. Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Amazon Region

5.1. Main Reasons of the Trade

The illegal wildlife trade is one of the world's most profitable criminal activities, partly due to the low risk of investigation and prosecution. Illegally obtained wildlife is significantly more profitable than that obtained legally. Therefore, given its low risk of prosecution and potential for high profitability, the illegal wildlife trade is heavily utilised by organised crime organisations. The structures of trade networks can differ significantly.

The five main markets of Illegal Wildlife Trade based on the UNODC classification are:

- Fashion,
- Exotic Pets,
- Traditional Medicine,
- Wild Food
- Accessories

None of these markets are illegal per definition and many of the products are traded legally. However, legal wildlife trade is examined to a limited extent. In addition, a significant positive relationship has been documented between legal imports and subsequent seizures.

a. Fashion

Fashion is easily the most recognizable and highly influential aspect of the illegal wildlife trade. Numerous fashion items, such as fur coats, leather purses, belts and shoes, contain animal products. Therefore, it is not surprising that fashion manufacturers, either knowingly or unknowingly, are among the primary consumers of IWT. Despite fur accounting for almost 90% of commodities in the legal wildlife trade for the fashion industry, the illegal trade primarily involves reptile skins that are used to make leather products. The lower presence of fur in IWT is largely due to widespread fur farming, which has reduced the demand for illegal fur products. Thus, it is presumed that the cost of breeding and feeding animals until they reach slaughter size outweighs the market price. However, a downward trend in wildlife-related fashion imports and exports has been observed. In contrast, the confiscation of living animals intended for the pet trade has escalated.

b. Exotic Pets

An exotic pet, also referred to as a wild pet, is a non-native or non-domesticated species of animal that is kept or traded for entertainment or companionship. The exotic pet trade is a substantial part of the international wildlife trade. For instance, 68% of parrot (psittaciformes) populations studied in the Neotropics are impacted by the capture of birds for the local pet trade, which threatens these populations more than any other factor. Additionally, these animals are traded internationally. Some parrot species are sold at prices up to 1,500 times higher on European markets than in Latin America.

Motivations for owning and trading exotic pets can include being an 'animal enthusiast', financial investments, competitions (such as song contests for birds) or

status symbols. The exotic pet trade mostly consists of birds and reptiles. However, there is also a growing illegal trade in invertebrates, such as tarantulas (theraphosidae).

As well as being held as pets or for competitions, exotic and endangered animals are often traded as status symbols. These include cheetahs (*Acinonyx jubatus*) in the Gulf states and tigers (*Panthera tigris*) in the USA, which are held in private or unlicensed zoos. These practices increase both demand and prices, as well as the exploitation of already threatened species.

Nowadays, ecotourism is becoming an increasingly popular alternative to species exploitation. While nature tourism can be beneficial for endangered species, it can also cause more harm than good if commercial interests take precedence over animal welfare. For example, carnivores such as tigers are often used as tourist attractions for photos, videos, and for visitors to touch, hold, or ride them. It is known that animals are drugged, have their teeth and claws cut or removed, or are otherwise restrained for such activities. Furthermore, profit-oriented management may also open the way for IWT. Trafficking on request (i.e. poaching and smuggling to order) has been known to occur.

c. Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine is defined as "the collective knowledge, skills and practices based on theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether or not they can be explained, used to maintain health and to prevent, diagnose, improve or treat physical and mental illnesses". Although they are often referred to as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) or traditional Asian medicine (TAM), traditional medicines are also consumed in many other regions of the world, including Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Australia, North America and Europe. More than 50,000 plant species and 700 fungal species, as well as over 500 animal species, are used for medicinal purposes globally. While the consumption of traditional medicines is not usually illegal, many endangered species are seriously

threatened. For example, 53% of the reptiles used in traditional medicines globally are listed as endangered, which further complicates the adoption of laws and regulations.

d. Wild Food

In most cases, harvesting and consuming wild food such as animals, plants and fungi is not considered illegal. However, harvesting protected species or failing to abide by the necessary regulations like hunting without a valid permit or during the off-season constitutes a wildlife crime. Furthermore, the excessive and unregulated harvesting of wild species can lead to a considerable decline in biodiversity. Wild meat, often referred to as 'bushmeat', is an important food source for lower-income and rural households and is sometimes the only source of protein for many people. It is also consumed by people with a higher income to signify wealth and status.

Research revealed that bushmeat consumption decreased in most Central African states between 1990 and 2005. However, this trend may have changed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bushmeat consumption often increases with income as wild food is often consumed as a delicacy or a status symbol. Examples can include caviar and other seafood, pangolin, king cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) and many other protected species and their associated products. A study concluded that wild food is frequently consumed to demonstrate wealth and status, particularly in business-related contexts. According to the UNODC, bushmeat is increasingly used as a source of income by lower-income households rather than for consumption. Organised crime groups often serve as buyers and resellers, quickly taking advantage of the bushmeat trend in urbanised and high-income neighbourhoods.

Criminal organisations also heavily exploit seafood, especially caviar. There is extensive evidence of the laundering of wild caviar. It is estimated that up to 90% of caviar is sourced illegally. While farming has been established as a conservation tool

for some wild food species, some studies show that consumers still favour wild products over farmed ones.

e. Accessories

The Illegal wildlife trade covers a wide range of products, including illegal hunting trophies like antlers or skins, furniture such as elephant footstools, jewellery made of turtle shells, talismans and amulets containing animal parts, souvenirs like pinned butterflies, coral, or plant ornaments, and decorations like ivory carvings. Ivory features heavily in IWT. It is commonly used for decorative purposes, such as accessories or jewellery. Between 2009 and 2018, ivory and other elephant products were responsible for nearly a third of all items listed in the UNODC World WISE Database. As many other papers focus on the illegal ivory trade, this review does not cover it in adequate depth.

Wild plants, such as cacti, succulents, and orchids, are heavily traded for ornamental purposes, with over 85% of traded ornamental plants belonging to the Orchidaceae family. Furthermore, illegal logging and trade are responsible for the largest annual loss of resources of all environmental crimes, accounting for approximately 30–100 billion USD.

5.2. Main Methods of the Trade

Given its low risk of prosecution and high profit, IWT is among the world's most profitable illegal activities and is heavily exploited by organised crime syndicates. The structures of IWT networks can differ widely. Local activities such as poaching and selling on national markets are mostly carried out by residents who are not necessarily directly involved in organised crime. In contrast, international trade and smuggling are highly controlled by organised crime groups. Generally, the simplest types of IWT networks are those involving subsistence and local use, while

more complicated networks can include gatekeepers, multiple barriers to markets, and redundant channels.

IWT usually involves three main types of actors: harvesters, intermediaries and consumers. Harvesting can be for subsistence, opportunistic, organised or recreational purposes. Intermediaries often act as logisticians, smugglers, government officials, processors and vendors. The consumption of IWT goods can serve medical, ornamental, cultural, nutritional, and creative purposes.

Whether dead or alive, wildlife falls into the hands of middlemen, including boatmen, farmers, and truck and bus drivers. Further up the trade chain are small- and medium-scale traffickers with connections to major traffickers operating within the country and abroad. Some of the wildlife is then exported to Europe, Asia and North America via major ports and airports, while the rest is used locally.

The remote borders between Amazonian countries provide ideal opportunities for traffickers to export wild animals. Research has shown that traffickers sometimes 'launder' wildlife through zoos or so-called 'scientific/conservation' or commercial breeding institutions, legal or not, which provide false certificates claiming the animals were born in captivity, enabling them to be imported or exported.

The illegal wildlife trade has been linked to other illegal activities, such as the trafficking of drugs, weapons, alcohol and gems. In fact, drugs have been known to be hidden in animal skins. As traffickers try to hide the animals, they are often transported in ways that are dangerous to their health and welfare, such as being packed into very small and cramped spaces, which can result in injuries or suffocation.

Some main methods are listed below,

5.1. Poaching and Hunting

The initial step in the illegal trade occurs when animals are illegally captured or poached directly from their natural habitat. In the Amazon's forested areas, birds, reptiles, mammals and amphibians are captured by poachers. These animals are either gathered to be sold alive or killed for meat, skin, teeth, claws or many other body parts. Most hunts target protected species and often happen in the national parks or on native community territories.

5.2. Wildlife Trafficking Nets

One of the most crucial elements in the continuation of illegal trade is the existence of well-established smuggling networks. These networks act as the link between poachers and buyers, ensuring that products are transported from local communities to international markets. Smugglers typically transport animals or animal products in hidden compartments via trucks, boats, or aeroplanes. To make the process easier, they prepare forged documents and make the products look legitimate.

5.3. Online Markets and Social Media

As technology has developed, illegal trade has also shifted to the digital realm. Social media networks, online advertisement sites and messaging applications are being used effectively in the sale of exotic animals. Such digital platforms enable fast communication with both domestic and international buyers, protect confidentiality and make it harder to trace.

5.4. Local and Cross-Border Trafficking

As the Amazon river basin spans several countries, much of the illegal trade is conducted across borders. Animals are initially transported to local markets, then to neighboring countries and finally to intercontinental markets such as Asia, Europe and the Americas. Countries such as Colombia, Brazil and Peru are commonly involved in

this process. Transportation is mostly conducted by road, river transport or small aircraft.

5.5. Deforestation and Illegal Logging

Illegal logging and land clearing for agriculture in the Amazon region is destroying animals' natural habitats. This leaves animals more vulnerable and causes them to migrate closer to human habitation areas. This makes it much easier for these animals to be captured and traded. This process also disrupts the natural balance, causing more species to be targeted.

6. Environmental Impacts of Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Region

The illicit trade of wildlife and their parts threatens millions of animals' survival worldwide, accelerates the biodiversity crisis, and endangers our planet. But it's not just animals that suffer. Wildlife trafficking causes devastating impacts on ecosystems, human health, and the global economy. It also causes significant harm, including the destruction of wildlife resources and ecosystems, desertification, environmental degradation, and the risk of species extinction. Nevertheless, wildlife crime is often treated as a “victimless crime” and often fails to be set as a priority in fighting organized crime.

In any supply chain, traded products are targeted to maximise yields while minimising investment and effort, and wildlife hunting is no different. Animals may be targeted based on a suite of desirable traits conducive for a specific trade demand, such as when they are above average in size or abundance.

Trafficking in wildlife can diminish species populations and cause local or even global extinction. When endangered species are involved, any poaching or harvesting of that species to supply the illegal trade risks the species becoming extinct. Further worsening the problem is the fact that the demand for larger and more ornate specimens means that hunters and collectors often aim for the fittest individuals from the breeding population, with serious consequences for subsequent generations (Rosen & Smith, 2010). Moreover, many endangered species are fragile and require expert and delicate handling. The ways in which many animals and plants are caught, transported, and kept, however, frequently cause injury, death, or attrition, resulting in further losses especially when living animals or plants are trafficked (UN ECOSOC, 4 March 2003).

Wildlife trafficking is related to some of the most important underlying causes of biodiversity loss. It can threaten ecosystem functions. Beyond endangering species via population losses, wildlife overexploitation can cause long term ecological problems such as creating sex-ratio imbalances and slowing the reproduction rate of vulnerable species. With respect to the former problem, elephant poaching of bull elephants (i.e. males with large tusks) has left a severe gender imbalance amongst African elephants. Consequently, population recovery among elephants has been slowed because it has affected reproduction rates. With regard to slow reproduction rates, species like macaws have an extremely slow reproduction rate compared to others in the parrot family. Because macaws have historically been targeted disproportionately by poachers, their populations are less likely to rebound with fewer and fewer macaws left to reproduce with.

Population decline is further problematic if keystone species are affected by illicit trade. Keystone species have a significant direct and indirect effect on their surrounding ecosystem and other species within that ecosystem. Sharks, for example, have a key role in the oceanic system by preying upon smaller fish. Unfortunately, as

a result of shark finning that has decimated shark populations globally, populations of smaller fish have significantly increased leading to a decline in shellfish (Ferretti et al, August 2010).

Furthermore, ecosystems have been altered through environmentally destructive practices to remove wildlife, timber, and fish. In Peru, for instance, the demand for forest products has led to several iconic species becoming threatened with extinction. With regard to destructive fishing practices, cyanide and dynamite is used at times to capture fish by stunning them; this practice can also kill many other nearby fish and destroy coral reefs that provide a habitat for many aquatic species (McManus et al, 1997).

There have been several and severe examples of such population and biodiversity losses globally. It is estimated that 61.6% of the traded bird, mammal and reptile species show a decline in abundance, with 16.4% already facing local extirpations. The pressure of the increasing market value for several fish has had visible effects on many wild populations, especially those that depend on spawning aggregations, leading to loss of formerly healthy populations. Groupers, for example, are heavily fished worldwide and many wild stocks are now depleted (Sadovy de Mitcheson et al., 2020). The intensification of both illegal and legal shark finning and fishing throughout the world's oceans are causing the demise of several shark species that were once abundant (Worm et al., 2013). The totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*), is extensively fished in Mexico, and is now Critically Endangered due to the value of its swim bladder, considered a delicacy in China (Jaramillo-Legorreta et al., 2019). IUWT is also leading to declines in many invertebrate populations, although these were rarely quantified (Fukushima et al., 2020). Among plants, ~15,000 species used and often traded as medicinals are currently threatened with extinction (Schippmann et al., 2006), while many fungi are seen to have great potential for further exploitation (Hyde et al., 2019). Furthermore, the large numbers of individuals recorded in the trade usually do not reflect the mortality between harvest and destination, which can occur at high rates along the trade chain (Auliya et al., 2016). ([for reference](#))

7. Socioeconomic Impacts of Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Region

IWT has a devastating impact on economies, communities, and ecosystems. By undermining legal economies and fueling corruption, IWT threatens the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to harmonise economic growth with environmental preservation and social equity. Efforts to curb IWT are therefore not only about saving animals and plants but also about promoting sustainable livelihoods, protecting ecosystems and ensuring natural resources are managed in a way that benefits present and future generations. Thus, the global response to IWT should seek to protect biodiversity, uphold the welfare of non-human species and foster a sustainable and equitable future for all.

Illegal wildlife trade deals great damage to economies with a great dependence on wildlife related activities. Since IWT reduces biodiversity and results in the pain and deaths of many animals, wildlife tourism is amongst the activities that are affected badly. And thus economies with reliance on wildlife tourism malfunction.

Illegal wildlife trade also has great relations to zoonotic diseases (diseases that spread from animals to humans). Zoonotic diseases account for millions of human illnesses every year an epidemic of a deadly zoonotic virus (such as the ebola virus) can have huge social and economical impacts both locally and globally. Illegal wildlife trade opens the gate for such diseases to spread due to the conditions of animals being treated. Most poachers have the animals and parts of animals in very unhygienic conditions, thus the preexisting zoonotic viruses get the chance spread via every relation.

The illegal wildlife trade is an environmental issue as well as a matter of global security. The vast sums of money involved in this illicit trade often contribute to funding organized crime, including drug trafficking and money laundering. In some cases, these funds may even support extremist groups and fuel armed conflicts. The intertwining of the illegal wildlife trade with other forms of transnational crime poses a threat to global security, stability, and governance.

8. Current Situation

Criminal organisations involved in drug and wood trafficking are now also active in wildlife crime, making use of well-established smuggling routes and corrupt networks. These groups operate across national borders, particularly between Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela, making enforcement extremely difficult. The vast and remote geography of the Amazon further complicates matters, limiting the capacity of authorities to monitor and respond to illegal activities. Many of these regions lack the essential funding, personnel and infrastructure to successfully combat these crimes.

Another concerning trend is the increase in the use of online platforms and social media for trafficking. Illegal sales often take place in private groups on encrypted messaging platforms or via coded advertisements, which makes it even more difficult to detect and prevent these crimes. In many cases, existing national laws are either not strong enough or are not enforced properly, and the penalties for wildlife crimes remain low. This allows traffickers to operate with relative freedom.

The environmental consequences are severe. As well as driving certain species towards extinction, illegal trade can disrupt entire ecosystems, cause habitat deterioration and increase the spread of zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans, a risk that was highlighted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the issue is attracting growing international attention. Organisations such as UNEP, CITES and INTERPOL, as well as regional

governments, have begun to strengthen cooperation, enforcement training and public awareness campaigns. However, there are still significant gaps in policy, coordination and the implementation of these measures, meaning the biodiversity of the Amazon is still under serious threat.

9. Past International Actions

In recent decades, various international measures have been introduced to reduce illegal wildlife trading in the Amazon region, in response to increasing awareness of the environmental, economic and security consequences of this activity. One of the most crucial of these frameworks is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which has been in operation since the 1970s. All Amazonian countries are signatories to CITES, which regulates international trade in over 38,000 species via a system of permits and trade regulations. CITES has played a vital role in enforcing export controls on endangered Amazonian species, including jaguars, parrots, turtles and certain tree species.

Another significant development has been the enhanced involvement of INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization (WCO) in international operations. Initiatives such as Operation Thunder, which has been conducted annually since 2017, have resulted in the mass seizure of illegal wildlife in Latin America, the apprehension of criminals, and the recovery of endangered species. These operations highlight the growing cooperation in global environmental law enforcement.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has also played a significant role in supporting biodiversity conservation initiatives and advocating for stronger governance and environmental crime policies. UNEP has collaborated with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), an organisation that unites Amazon Basin countries to promote regional cooperation on environmental protection, including the prevention of wildlife crime.

Additionally, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society groups, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and TRAFFIC, have supported training for law enforcement, as well as community-based monitoring and public awareness campaigns across the Amazon region. These efforts are intended to strengthen local capacity, reduce demand and empower indigenous and rural communities to protect biodiversity.

10. Questions to be Addressed

- 1) What alternative sources of incomes can be provided for local communities to help reduce the economic motivations behind the illegal wildlife trade?
- 2) How can local and international organisations work together more effectively to detect and prevent illegal wildlife trade networks in the Amazon Region?
- 3) What legal, technological and administrative measures are required to strengthen the enforcement of wildlife protection laws?
- 4) What awareness campaigns and educational strategies would be most effective in reducing consumer demand for illegal wildlife products?
- 5) What links exist between the environmental impacts of illegal wildlife trade, deforestation and climate change, and how should these be reflected in policy actions?
- 6) Which regulations and digital methods of monitoring can be used to prevent illegal wildlife trade conducted through online platforms?
- 7) What measures can be put in order to detect and prevent the connection between organized crime groups and illegal wildlife trade?

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