

StamfordMUN I 2026

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CHAIR REPORT

United Nations Environment Programme Committee

Addressing the global trafficking of endangered species to protect biodiversity and prevent ecosystem collapse.

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1. Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

We are Sophia, Spenser, and Kaydan, your Head and Deputy Chairs for UNEP at SAISMUN 2026. Sophia and Spenser are currently 10th graders, and Kaydan is a 9th grader.

In the present world, governments and politicians turn a blind eye to environmental issues, and in the process, allow the impacts of a deteriorating environment to impact society. Because of that, a committee like UNEP is of utmost importance, where important environmental threats are addressed. The global trafficking of endangered species is very time-relevant, and we hope you feel more connected to and understanding of global issues following this conference.

As chairs, we value diplomacy, meaningful debate, and stepping outside your comfort zones. We encourage you to share your ideas confidently and challenge one another respectfully. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us via email!

We look forward to seeing you at the committee!

Sincerely,

Sophia Xiao, Spenser Mehta, Kaydan Chen

Chairs, United Nations Environment Programme Committee

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2. Committee Overview

2.1 Committee History and Purpose

UNEP was established in June 1972, after the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm. The committee's goal is to address pollution, habitat destruction, and the need for sustainable development. UNEP supports member nations by giving them a time and place to monitor, advocate for, collaborate on, and create solutions for environmental issues.

One of the most important treaties UNEP manages is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) by member states. Although this is not a UNEP treaty, UNEP still supports it because of CITES specific and targeted action against illegal trade of endangered species.

2.2 Powers and Limitations

UNEP is a programme/fund. What makes it different from a specialised agency, such as the WHO, or an intergovernmental body, such as the UNHRC, is its three limitations: no enforcement power, no full UN funding, and no legal basis.

UNEP cannot enforce or regulate other parties; it can only report or inform. UNEP is inherently a fund; it is not a part of the UN's main budget, so the Environmental Fund relies on donations. UNEP is not recognised as independent of the UN General Assembly by international law, which is why it has no legal basis. Thus, UNEP can only facilitate treaties; it cannot be a part of them. Instead, the UNEP exercises these powers through its governing body, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). Through UNEA, UNEP is able to pass resolutions, enforce, and regulate.

As a programme/fund, UNEP has the following capabilities: monitoring, reporting, managing, and can assist nations to create environmental ministries and legislature.

2.3 Voting Procedures

UNEP primarily makes decisions by reaching consensus. This is because UNEP, as a programme, cannot create legally binding resolutions. The committee "binds" member states morally; if a larger majority of states stand with an idea, it's harder for the smaller states to stay against it.

But if consensus is not reached, UNEP has procedures to ensure the committee can come to a decision. In some committees, for example, the Security Council, some nations have veto power. However, in UNEP, all delegations' votes are equal. A formal vote is called for, and a decision is reached either by simple majority, which is the majority of members present and voting, or two-thirds majority, which is at least two-thirds of committee members agreeing or disagreeing with the resolution. For most conferences, a two-thirds majority will be used.

3. Topic Introduction

3.1 Topic Overview

Trafficking of endangered species occurs when endangered species are captured, transported, and sold into the consumer market in various countries. The consumer market is driven by the need for exotic pets, luxury goods, traditional medicine, and bushmeat. Some of the most commonly trafficked animals and fauna are rosewood, ivory, rhino horns, pangolin scales, live reptiles, big cats, and eels.

According to the UNODC, over 4000+ species are affected by this trade across 162 different countries. Many of these endangered animals are considered keystone species; because of this trafficking, many of these species have suffered a 50% decline in population, as stated in the IUCN Red List.

3.2 Key Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Bushmeat	Meat from wild animals that are hunted for consumption
Transit Hubs	City, port, or country traffickers use to hide and transport trafficked animals
Hotspot	A region with high biodiversity and high threat levels
Trafficking	The illegal business of moving and selling banned things
Biodiversity	Variety of species
Keystone Species	According to the IUCN, “keystone species are species that are key in maintaining the integrity of the ecosystems they belong to.” In simple words, one that has a disproportionately large effect on the ecosystem, causing catastrophic changes upon removal.
Endangered	The IUCN classifies endangered species as “facing a high risk of extinction in the wild.”
Extinct	The IUCN defines extinct as “no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died.”
Umbrella Species	A wide-ranging species whose conservation automatically protects numerous other species and habitats within its extensive home range.

3.3 Socio-Economic Drivers and Root Causes

While trafficking in endangered species is often portrayed as purely a criminal issue, the drivers that push people into poaching and illegal trade are deeply rooted in socio-economic conditions. In many biodiversity-rich regions, local communities live in or near protected areas with limited access to education, healthcare, and formal employment. In these contexts, the profits from

capturing or transporting wildlife can be many times higher than legal income from agriculture or casual labour (UNODC, 2020).

Weak land tenure and unclear rights over natural resources can further worsen the problem. Where communities lack secure rights to manage and benefit from wildlife, they have fewer incentives to conserve it and may be more vulnerable to recruitment by traffickers (UNDP, 2012). In some countries, the lack of recognition of Indigenous Peoples' customary land rights undermines traditional conservation practices that previously helped keep populations stable.

In addition, conflict and insecurity can create conditions where wildlife trafficking becomes attractive. Armed groups and militias in some parts of Central and East Africa, as well as organised criminal networks in Latin America and Southeast Asia, have used illegal wildlife trade as a source of financing, taking advantage of weak state presence in remote areas (UNODC, 2020; UNEP–INTERPOL, 2016). Corruption along the entire enforcement chain, ranging from underpaid park rangers to customs officials, can lower the risks for traffickers and create a cycle in which criminal networks, not local communities, capture most of the profits.

4. Historical Background

4.1 Origins of the Issue

Trading and poaching of rare wildlife have existed for centuries, but the increase in the trafficking of these endangered animals in the 19th and 20th centuries is due to the boom in global shipping and expanding markets, which made it easier to move products like ivory, furs, exotic pets, and later items tied to traditional medicine and luxury consumption. As the demand for such products increased, hunters and middlemen could earn a greater amount than they could earn from a legal livelihood.

By the 1960s, scientists and governments began publicly recognizing that some species were declining so quickly that unregulated trade could push them toward extinction. This period in time was marked by international conservation science and “threat status” tracking (for example, the IUCN Red List was established in 1964), which helped reveal the scale of biodiversity loss and made wildlife trade a global issue rather than a local issue.

4.2 Key Historical Events

1963 – IUCN members call for a global agreement to regulate international wildlife trade, laying the groundwork for what becomes CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species).

1964 – The IUCN (The International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List is established, helping standardize which species are threatened.

1972 – Stockholm Conference elevates environmental issues globally. UNEP was founded soon after.

1973 – CITES is adopted, creating global rules to regulate or ban trade in listed species.

1989 – CITES Parties ban international commercial trade in African elephant ivory, a major turning point showing trade bans can be used to reduce pressure on highly targeted species.

2015 – The UN General Assembly adopts a resolution on tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife, and the SDGs include Target 15.7 calling to end poaching and trafficking.

2016 – UNEA adopts Resolution 2/14 on illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products, reinforcing UNEP’s role and urging stronger cooperation and action.

4.3 Evolution of International Response

Early approach (pre-1970s): Local or national hunting rules, often weakly enforced and easy to bypass through cross-border trade.

Trade-control era (1970s–1990s): The international community shifted toward regulating trade through CITES using permit systems, trade monitoring, and some products were outright bans. This made “legal vs. illegal trade” a central concept in conservation policy.

Crime-and-enforcement era (2000s–present): Wildlife trafficking increasingly gets treated as organized, transnational crime linked to corruption, money laundering, and armed groups in some contexts. Cooperation expanded beyond the environment ministries to include customs, police, prosecutors, and financial investigators. The UNGA’s 2015 resolution reflects this shift, and SDG 15.7 frames trafficking as both a biodiversity and sustainable-development issue.

5. Present Day

5.1 Present-Day Overview

Global trafficking of endangered species is a prominent concern. Endangered species makes it more severe, as global trade of endangered species is prohibited by the CITES convention. Yearly, this illegal industry is worth 20 billion dollars (USD). As of 2026, the most prominently trafficked animals and flora are as follows: songbirds, freshwater turtles, pangolins, primates, freshwater eels, sharks, rays, succulents, and cycads. Furthermore, with the growth of technology and AI, trafficking methods have begun utilising these modern tools. The most significant modern method is wildlife laundering. Laundering is the process by which criminals make something illegal look legal. To get these endangered species across borders and into the legal supply, traffickers falsify paperwork about the animals and introduce them into legal supply chains. As a result, these traffickers can earn money without the barrier of the law and regulations.

5.2 Key Stakeholders

Operation Thunder, created by Interpol and the World Customs Organisation, is a multinational crackdown that happens every year to target illegal trafficking of animals and flora. In 2025, 134 countries were involved in the crackdown, and the operation was able to successfully seize 30,000 live animals, 30+ tonnes of materials classified under the Endangered Species Act, and 5.8 tonnes of bushmeat.

Oppositely, many countries in tropical regions, with more exotic animals, have the most illegal trafficking. Countries such as Nigeria, Brazil, and Indonesia are home to many of the top trafficked animals.

Some countries, because of their geographical location, weaker legislation, and busy transport systems, are reported as major transit points for illegal trafficking. This includes countries such as Vietnam, Turkey, and the Netherlands.

Many countries in Europe and North America are consumer markets for these species. In the US, many of these endangered animals are desired as exotic pets, for fashion, and decoration. In Europe, similarly to the US, many of these animals are kept as exotic pets. Furthermore, these endangered animals are also coveted as edible delicacies.

United for Wildlife and TRAFFIC are organisations addressing illegal and endangered species trafficking. United for Wildlife, founded by Prince William and the Royal Foundation, focuses on creating partnerships between governments, law enforcement, NGOs, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and the private sector. TRAFFIC is a top global wildlife trade monitoring network.

5.3 Current Challenges

Weak Legislation

Many countries end up becoming transit points or main regions for illegal trafficking because of weak legislation. Firstly, in many countries, wildlife trafficking is not considered a serious offense; it is only regulatory. Traffickers can get away with minimal punishment, usually a fine of no more than 5,000, and in most cases keep their profits. Endangered species trafficking has more serious punishment, but it is not systemised across countries.

Lack of Transnational Cooperation

Countries have varying laws and enforcement regarding endangered species trafficking, which can make it difficult for traffickers to be effectively punished if they escape to a country with differing laws that the country they trafficked the animal from. Furthermore, local law enforcement's power is limited to their own country. Once a trafficker crosses the border, countries will need to communicate and collaborate with one another. However, that communication can often be slow, inefficient, and incompatible, especially with differing legal systems and barriers.

Technological Barrier

Previously, the trade of endangered species was a physical exchange. However, with the growth of technological tools, many traffickers have begun using the internet to trade. Traffickers exploit legal loopholes; for example, using encrypted apps, where law enforcement cannot monitor conversations, or using emojis, misspellings, and encoded language to bypass the automated filters on the internet. Most importantly, there is simply too much suspicious activity on the

internet for law enforcement to be able to process all of it, and traffickers use that to go undetected.

6. Impacts of Illegal Trafficking

6.1 Ecological and Climate Impacts

Illegal trafficking of endangered species is not only a threat to individual animals and plants. It can destabilise entire ecosystems. Many trafficked species are Keystone or Umbrella species

7. Past International Actions

7.1 UN Resolutions and Declarations

UNEA Resolution 1/3: Illegal Trade in Wildlife (2014)

This resolution addressed the gap between the economic and legal security of a nation and wildlife crimes. It called for the strengthening of the collaboration of UNEP with CITES, as well as the negative impact that political and legal corruption has on reducing illegal wildlife trafficking.

General Assembly Resolution A/RES/69/314 (2015)

This resolution was the first resolution to specifically address the illegal trafficking of wildlife. It called for recognising illegal trafficking as a serious crime, and the use of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) as a tool.

General Assembly Resolution A/RES/77/325 (2023)

This resolution addresses concerns because of the COVID19 pandemic. The combination of technological growth and rising diseases from animals significantly impacted the wildlife trade. Thus, this resolution addresses both the online trade of wildlife and the health concerns of humans, animals, and the ecosystem.

7.2 International Treaties and Agreements

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES is an international treaty, beginning in 1975, to guarantee the protection of wildlife and ensure that international trade is monitored and restricted. It has 185 signatories; 184 are from countries, and the last is from a regional organisation, the EU.

Lusaka Agreement on Co-operative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora

This agreement created a permanent task force of investigators, specifically for crimes and concerns regarding animals and plants. This task force is specific to the African region and is known as the Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF). It was signed in 1994 in Lusaka, Zambia, and went into effect in 1996.

Doha Declaration (UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC))

Most recently, in 2025, following the 11th Conference of the States Parties in Doha, a resolution was proposed by Brazil and Namibia to prevent and combat corruption crimes regarding the environment. The resolution was adopted by consensus on December 19th, 2025, thus explicitly including environmental corruption crimes in UNCAC.

7.3 Assessment: What Has Worked and What Hasn't

Countries have been successful in addressing previous gaps and problems. Many countries have made more legal efforts to constrain the buying and selling of these animals. For example, China banned the local sale of elephant ivory in 2017. Coordinated operations between countries have also increased, most recently in 2025 with Operation SAMA in Africa. Wildlife trafficking is also now classified as a “Serious Offense”, allowing countries to take a more committed stance against traffickers and implement more advanced measures.

However, illegal trafficking of endangered species is a continuously growing and adapting problem; many issues still exist. Firstly, weak enforcement. There is a lot of legislation and treaties in place. Even though some treaties are binding, the lack of enforcement makes it hard for it to be effective. Some resolutions and declarations are non-binding, so it's hard to monitor and address effectively and consistently what countries are doing.

8. Bloc Positions and National Perspectives

8.1 G7 Nations

Although not a formal UN bloc, the G7 is the forum for the world's leading industrialised democracies, making their stance incredibly influential. At the 2015 G7 Summit, the leaders of the seven nations emphasised their commitment to combatting illegal trafficking. In an official statement, they described the trafficking as “pushing some of the world's species to the brink of extinction and in some instances is being used to finance organized crime, insurgencies, and terrorism.” They also highlighted the prioritisation of environmental protection in global supply

chains, the responsibility of both governments and businesses to cultivate sustainable supply chains, and strengthening the system of multilateral treaties.

8.2 African Group

African nations view the trafficking of endangered species not only as a serious crime but also as a threat to their heritage and biodiversity, seeing as how a vast number of species being trafficked originate from Africa. Their priorities include: Increasing political commitment to combatting the issue, improving the efficacy and integrity of governments, stopping the supply, reducing the economic and security impacts of trafficking, and increasing public awareness, among other things.

8.3 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

ASEAN views the trafficking of endangered species as a serious issue and has facilitated various responses. The ASEAN Regional Action Plan on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora provides a shared framework on how to address the issue, which prioritises communication between law enforcement, strengthening legislation, increasing the availability of scientific information for authorities managing wildlife trade, and inter-agency cooperation. Furthermore, the region of Southeast Asian countries, especially Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar (Golden Triangle) is a major hotspot for trafficking, making the issue an urgent priority for ASEAN.

8.4 Latin America and Caribbean Nations

Wildlife trafficking is a high priority for Latin American countries, especially because it threatens their unique biodiversity. In 2019, the Lima Declaration on Illegal Wildlife Trade was signed by 21 countries, primarily consisting of Latin American and Caribbean nations. It prioritised strengthening legal frameworks, reducing demand for trafficked wildlife products, and enhancing regional cooperation to protect biodiversity and combat the trafficking of wildlife.

8.5 USMCA (United States, Mexico, and Canada)

Although it is a trade agreement, not a UN bloc, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement of 2020 commits signatory countries to combat the trafficking of timber and fish, among other fauna and flora, uniting them under one stance on wildlife trafficking, making it useful for delegates to understand. The agreement is incredibly beneficial, seeing as how all signatory countries are victims of wildlife trafficking in some manner. US Homeland Security Investigations recognises illegal wildlife trade as a huge threat to the economy and ecosystems. Wildlife trafficking frequently intersects with organised crime in Canada, while Mexico's rich biodiversity makes it a source and transit nation for traffickers.

8.6 BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)

Although BRICS is a more economically focused group, the bloc has emphasised the need to protect biodiversity. Each member holds some sort of stake in global wildlife, especially Brazil, which is home to the Amazon Rainforest, hosting roughly 10% of all known species in the world. In the September 26, 2025, BRICS Joint Media Statement, the countries recognised the serious threat posed by wildlife trade, seeking to combat it through strengthened cooperation

between member states in the form of information sharing, law enforcement, and building the capacity of legal and institutional systems. They sought to support these efforts through frameworks agreed on by multiple nations.

9. Key Questions for Debate

1. How can the demand for illegally traded wildlife products be addressed while stopping the immediate flow of wildlife trade?
2. How can illegal wildlife trade be effectively monitored and mitigated?
3. How can the committee stop wildlife trafficking while preserving the livelihoods in communities dependent on wildlife trade?
4. How can individuals of varying power, ranging from a trafficker to a corrupt official, be fairly held accountable for wildlife trafficking?
5. How can a variety of resources, such as newer technologies like artificial intelligence, be utilized to combat wildlife trafficking?
6. To what extent should the committee balance stopping the immediate flow of wildlife trade, while also addressing the root causes that turn individuals towards crime?

10. Country List

Australia

Botswana

Brazil

China

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Germany

India

Indonesia

Japan

Kenya

Malaysia

Namibia

Nigeria

Peru

Singapore

South Africa

Tanzania

Thailand

Turkey

United Arab Emirates

United Kingdom

United States

Vietnam

Zimbabwe

11. Resources for Further Research

11.1 Official UN Resources

- UN Chronicle - <https://www.udn.org/ru/issue/378> - The UN's magazine which contains various articles discussing wildlife trafficking. Useful for doing a more in depth exploration of a specific aspect of wildlife trafficking.
- [Three ways the United Nations Environment Programme works to address illegal trade in wildlife](#) - Can help delegates understand what the UNEP is doing right now to tackle illegal wildlife trade in their own words.
- [World Wildlife Crime Report 2024](#) - A report on the state of wildlife trafficking in 2024, along with multiple case studies. Quite a long read, but there are lots of graphs and statistics which can be useful for reference in debate.

11.2 News and Current Events

- BBC - [Lion DNA convicts poachers in world first](#) - Can give some insight and perhaps even ideas on how technology can be used to combat wildlife trafficking
- The Star - [Why pangolins are the most trafficked mammal in the world | The Star](#) - Allows delegates to better understand wildlife trafficking through the lens of one of the most trafficked species
- Down to Earth - [Wildlife trafficking widespread, but major offenders escape with soft penalties, finds report](#) - Highlights issues in holding traffickers accountable, can give delegates some ideas as to what they want to achieve regarding punishment of wildlife trafficking

11.3 Accessible Explainers

- United Nations Development Program - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4msLUpEsi8> - A brief but accessible overview of wildlife trafficking
- kids.earth.org - <https://kids.earth.org/protecting-wildlife/what-is-the-illegal-wildlife-trade/> - A digestible list of the most commonly trafficked species
- Britannica Kids - <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/poaching/631335> - An article about poaching, the first step of wildlife trafficking, in a format aimed towards middle schoolers

11.4 Country Research Resources

- UN Member States Portal: un.org/en/about-us/member-states