

I2LEC Crackdown on Environmental Crime in Congo Basin Recovers \$11.2 Million in Illicit Goods

ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, November 14, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A multinational law enforcement operation codenamed 'Operation Jungle Shield', coordinated by the International Initiative of Law Enforcement for Climate (I2LEC), has uncovered extensive environmental crimes across the Congo Basin.

The operation dealt a significant blow to organized crime groups, seizing 2,111kg of ivory and 34 kg of pangolin scales, rescuing a live pangolin from trafficking, and confiscating 180 pieces of equipment used for criminal activities. 58 suspects were arrested and charged with various environmental crimes. The total value of seizures is estimated at US\$11,227,857.

Operation Jungle Shield also highlighted the devastating impact of these crimes, with 53 elephants killed for their tusks and one panther killed for its skin during the operation period. The operation also uncovered significant environmental damage in the Congo Basin. Satellite imagery analysis revealed that an area equivalent to 728 football fields had been deforested during the operation period. Additionally, the operation identified illegal logging and charcoal production activities, which are estimated to have resulted in 213,227 tons of CO2 emissions.

Operation Jungle Shield saw the participation of law enforcement agencies from seven countries: Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Zambia, Angola, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Gabon. The operation was supported by the Lusaka Agreement Task Force and the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI). The primary objective was to target illegal logging, illegal mining, wildlife trafficking, and poaching in the Congo Basin.

The joint operation, carried out between October 28 and November 10, 2024, and coordinated by I2LEC, an initiative of the UAE Ministry of Interior, established in partnership with UN Office on Drugs and Crime, generated crucial intelligence for investigating transnational environmental crime networks with 287 personnel deployed in the field.

Lt. Colonel Dana Humaid, Director-General of the International Affairs Bureau, UAE Ministry of Interior, and Coordinator of I2LEC, stated: "Operation Jungle Shield represents a significant milestone in our ongoing efforts to combat environmental crimes globally. The success of this operation in the Congo Basin demonstrates the power of international cooperation and the critical role of law enforcement in protecting our planet's vital ecosystems. I2LEC remains

committed to supporting and empowering law enforcement agencies worldwide in their fight against environmental crimes. The intelligence gathered during this operation will be invaluable in our continued efforts to dismantle criminal networks and preserve biodiversity in the Congo Basin and beyond.”

The operation also shed light on the transnational nature of environmental crimes in the region. Many of the illegal activities uncovered were found to be destined for Asian markets, emphasizing the global scale of the challenge and the need for intercontinental cooperation in combating these crimes.

Edward Phiri, Director, Lusaka Agreement Task Force, the operational arm of an intergovernmental treaty known as Lusaka Agreement on Cooperative Enforcement directed at illegal trade in wild fauna and flora in Africa, said: “The success of Operation Jungle Shield marks a significant milestone in collaborative law enforcement across the Congo Basin, and in Lusaka Agreement member states, underscoring LATF's catalytic role in uniting member states for a common cause and paving the way for lasting partnerships in climate-focused law enforcement.”

Brigadier General Dieudonné David Kitenge Amisi, Commander of the Operational Corps for the Protection of Nature (CorPPN OPS RENS), highlighting and praising the efforts during the operation: “The Democratic Republic of the Congo is committed to protecting its natural heritage, and the success of Operation Jungle Shield reflects the dedication of our rangers. With support from the UAE Ministry of Interior and I2LEC, we are strengthening our resolve against environmental threats and preserving our nation’s future.”

More investigations and coordinated efforts are expected to follow as part of the ongoing commitment to combat environmental crimes in one of the world's most crucial ecological regions.

The Congo Basin, often referred to as the "lungs of Africa," plays a crucial role in global climate regulation. It is the world's second-largest tropical rainforest, absorbing vast amounts of carbon dioxide and serving as a vital habitat for countless species. Operation Jungle Shield's findings highlight the urgent need for continued international cooperation to protect this invaluable ecosystem.

ENDS

Background Information

The International Initiative of Law Enforcement for Climate (I2LEC), launched in 2023 and co-led by the UAE Ministry of Interior in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), is a global platform, aimed at awareness-raising, capacity-building and research with respect to crimes that affect the environment and climate change.

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