



## **Sahabat Alam Malaysia** **Friends of the Earth Malaysia**

For Environmental Justice

1, Jalan Joki, 11400 Penang, Malaysia  
Tel No: +604 827 6930  
Fax No: +604 827 6932  
Email: foemalaysia@gmail.com  
<https://www.foe-malaysia.org>

### **PRESS CONFERENCE**

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#### **Malaysian Wildlife Trade Hampering Conservation Efforts**

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) expresses great concern that Malaysia has been, for the wrong reasons, identified by TRAFFIC (a wildlife trade monitoring network) as a popular transit country used by criminal networks for the lucrative illegal wildlife trade.

The theme for this year's World Environment Day, celebrated on 5th June, is Fight against the Illegal Trade in Wildlife. It is apt for SAM to reiterate our call to the relevant authorities to stamp out illegal wildlife trade that put Malaysia in the wrong spotlight:

- Malaysia was the top exporter of tropical logs in 2013 (3.5 million cu m),
- A primary source of illegal shipment of agarwood (7 metric tonnes between 2005 and 2014 seized),
- One of the top reptile skin illegal exporters.
- In 2010 and 2013 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) destroyed a total of more than 2,241 poachers' traps and 1,728 illegal camps.

If illegal wildlife trade is not curbed then Malaysia's 26 endangered animals (including the Malayan tiger, common otter and 11 species of bats) will go extinct. Already extinct are the Javan rhinoceros, Banteng, and the Indian grey mongoose.

Other animals in the 'vulnerable', 'near threatened' and 'of least concern' categories are not safe either as poaching, illegal wildlife trade, possession of endangered species, and the consumption of animal parts as exotic food are decimating their population.

Although Malaysia's domestic ivory market was not formally assessed, it is the second most prominent destination for illegal shipments of ivory basing on their seizures reported to World Wildlife Seizures (World WISE). According to the Malaysian authorities, about 60 per cent of the weight of the ivory seized was destined for China. Most of the illegal ivory were shipped and Malaysia has been identified as one of the key transit countries with Port Klang being a port of choice for containerised shipment.

Again, Malaysia has been identified as one of the top six source countries for legal reptile skins and also for illegally traded reptile skins according to World WISE. It has been estimated that out of every 1,000 skins legally traded, one would be an illegally traded skin and most of the pythons came from the wild. The actual extent of the underlying illegal market is not known.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) trade data showed that Indonesia and Malaysia together exported an average of 22 metric tonnes of python meat, equivalent to the meat of 2,000 to 4,000 snakes, annually between the period of 2009 and 2013. Python gall bladders were harvested for traditional medicine.

Over two decades (1980-2000) Singapore was an importer of more than 50,000 pangolin skins, mostly from Malaysia. The skin of a pangolin is promoted as exotic leather, the scales were for traditional medicine and the meat as food, CITES trade data revealed.

Poaching is the single major threat to the critically endangered Sumatran rhinoceros in Sabah. The fallacious belief in Asia that their horns have medicinal values ranging from curing hangovers to cancers has encouraged poachers to hunt them. Moreover, the prices of rhinoceros horns can fetch tens of thousands of Ringgit per kilogramme.

With issuance of hunting licences the loss of more animals may become even more serious. Hence SAM calls for a ban on issuance of hunting permits for all wildlife and not just for the sambar deer.

State governments seem more concerned with commercialisation of protected species and to increase resource use practices than in complying their legal mandate conserving the ecosystem. In this regard, local communities can be made stakeholders, educated on conservation and be involved in conservation projects.

Wildlife traders in Asia have turned to social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram to evade detection while conducting transactions internationally. Curbing the illegal wildlife trade has been largely fruitless because the current enforcement efforts are either ineffective or not deterrent enough. The lack of enforcement efforts point to a lack of political will among those responsible at national and international levels in protecting wildlife species.

SAM believes that illegal trade could be reduced if Malaysia implemented surveillance of such illegal trade by cybercrime units and special monitoring programmes with the cooperation of the international community. Strong deterrent measures such as heavy fines or/and longer imprisonment must be imposed and enforced stringently.

Enforcement efforts should also match with the level of growing involvement of sophisticated, well-funded and increasingly armed criminal organisations in the illegal wildlife trade.

Wise planning, clear policies and scientific advice is clearly needed from experts to ensure human and wildlife can thrive and live conflict-free.

**S. M. Mohamed Idris**  
**President**  
**Sahabat Alam Malaysia**