



Environmental Cooperation-Asia (ECO-Asia) ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network



James Compton / ITRAFIC Southeast Asia

Police, customs and environmental management agencies in Southeast Asian countries need to form national, regional and international networks dedicated to investigating and eliminating illegal wildlife crime.

BACKGROUND The illegal wildlife trade is the world's third largest black market, surpassed only by illicit commerce in arms and drugs. In Southeast Asia, the problem is particularly serious because its rich biodiversity, well-developed transport infrastructure and weak wildlife law enforcement have left the region vulnerable to exploitation.

Illegal wildlife trade has led to destruction on a massive scale, threatening irrevocable damage to Southeast Asia's ecosystems. Illegal wildlife traffickers operate both within and between countries, through well-organized, cross-border networks. To effectively combat this crisis, law enforcement agencies must match tactics with the offenders. Police, customs and environmental management agencies need to form national, regional and international networks dedicated to investigating and eliminating large-scale illegal wildlife crime.

Until recently, such collaborative networks between wildlife law enforcement agencies were unknown in Southeast Asia. The region's governments are now taking bold action to create vital cooperative links. The initiative began in October 2004 with Thailand proposing creation of a regional wildlife law enforcement network at the 13th Conference of the Parties to the Convention in Trade of Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES). This groundbreaking call to action implemented key components of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Action Plan on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora 2005-2010 and marked the first decisive step toward regional wildlife enforcement. Cooperative efforts took another step forward in December 2005 when senior ASEAN officials met to formally launch the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN).

USAID supports the initiative with assistance designed to take ASEAN-WEN forward from its conceptual stage to a fully fledged transnational network against wildlife crime.

APPROACH ASEAN-WEN engages all ten ASEAN countries, China and the United States and works at both the national and regional levels. At the national level, participant governments create interagency task forces that involve police, customs and CITES officers. These task forces work to strengthen law enforcement and comply with CITES protocols. At the regional level, task forces also serve as focal points in the battle against transnational wildlife crime, exchanging vital intelligence between countries about cross border syndicates.

ASEAN-WEN is the only nature crime network in the world that involves participation by numerous countries and agencies. Recognizing this, the ECO-Asia ASEAN-WEN Support Project focuses support at three critical levels:

- Development and capacity building for national wildlife crime task forces;
- Regional cooperation and interaction among task forces; and
- Collaboration with the global law enforcement community.

Project activities include:

Agency Surveys Compilation of wildlife law enforcement data in participating countries provides essential baseline data for measuring ASEAN-WEN impacts and successes. Surveys allow identification of potential task force participants and help set priorities for training and capacity building activities.

Training and Capacity Building Specific courses and workshops provide the means to sustain effective wildlife law enforcement. Training packages, produced in local languages, are designed to address gaps in wildlife law enforcement.

Public Awareness Increased public understanding about the illegal wildlife trade and civil society support are essential for addressing wildlife crime. Nongovernmental, media and corporate organizations play a helpful role by providing additional support and positive publicity for ASEAN-WEN.

Regional Meetings and Cooperative Events Gatherings between policy stakeholders and national task forces enable the network's development. During these events, various ASEAN-WEN participants share information, plan cross border operations, and discuss mutual challenges.

The ten ASEAN member countries are participants in ASEAN-WEN. The network also plans to work with other countries linked to Southeast Asia's trade, including the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, the African states, and the European Union.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS WildAid, TRAFFIC, ASEAN, Government of Thailand, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Forest Service, CITES Secretariat



Every year, millions of dollars worth of illegally harvested animal and plant species are trafficked and sold in Southeast Asia.

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