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SYNTHETIC/BIO-FABRICATED RHINO HORN

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CITES AND RHINO HORN TRADE

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CITES AND RHINO HORN TRADE





***IRF BELIEVES THAT THE RHINO HORN TRADE SHOULD NOT BE LEGALIZED
UNTIL THERE ARE CONVINCING DATA INDICATING THAT LEGALIZATION
WILL ENHANCE WILD RHINO CONSERVATION EFFORTS.***

Heated discussions in the international conservation community are percolating about the legalization of trade in rhino horn, as well as trade affecting the conservation of other wildlife and plant species. Beginning Saturday, 24 September through 4 October, representatives from nearly every country on Earth will gather in Johannesburg, South Africa for the world's most important meeting regarding wildlife trade – the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, or [CITES](#).

The debate to legalize rhino horn trade has deeply polarized the rhino conservation community. The key issue is whether or not legalizing horn trade could escalate demand in Asian markets. Legalizing trade lends credibility to the idea that rhino horn has medicinal value, which is not supported by credible scientific studies. And, there is no way to predict what the unintended consequences of legalizing horn trade might mean for tiny populations of Sumatran and Javan rhinos, already teetering on the brink of extinction.

Then there is the question as to whether the purpose of legalizing trade is to reduce demand or to try to meet demand. It seems highly unlikely that a legal trade in rhino horn could meet the accelerating demand. Questions around the potential market dynamics are unclear, and the very real potential looms that legalizing horn trade could exacerbate the rhino poaching crisis. Some experts believe that the CITES-approved one-off sale of excess elephant ivory in 2008, designed to reduce demand, may have unintentionally sparked the current demand for ivory, contributing to the current crisis and the deaths of 30,000 African elephants a year. We believe that this is important information to consider when discussing legalizing rhino horn trade.

The potential of opening trade in rhino horn has brought forth a range of emotions and arguments. We recognize that the conservation challenges in Africa are enormous and complex and, as a US-based NGO, we bring a western-biased perspective. The IRF respects all rhino range states' efforts to manage its own natural resources, which includes maintaining healthy rhino populations as well as raising money for the important work of protecting and conserving these assets. Wildlife-based land use in Africa requires substantial funding to meet associated conservation costs. In some places ecotourism may not be feasible because political factors that deter typical tourism (e.g., in Zimbabwe). Many countries rely on legal hunts, with permits allocated by CITES, to fund much of the rhino protection efforts in key landscapes. There is an urgent need to explore many economic options apart from legalizing trade to protect endangered species. It also must be recognized that the challenges associated with land-use and wildlife conservation issues are real and must be seriously considered.

It is safe to say that all parties agree that we would like to see self-sustaining, viable populations of rhinos in the wild. No one wants extinction for these magnificent animals. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution that will solve the rhino poaching crisis: legalizing trade on its own will not work; nor will anti-poaching patrols be sufficient unless there also is a reduction in demand for horn in Asian markets. For now though, there is not enough information available to determine whether legalizing horn trade will exacerbate the current poaching crisis.

COP 17 discussions about rhinos. African rhinos currently face the greatest threat of their history. Over the last century, South Africa has spearheaded the recovery of the white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*). The white rhino is an iconic conservation success story – coordinated efforts by the South African government and committed conservationists brought the species back from fewer than 50 animals to a remarkable 19,682 – 21,077 today. This extraordinary conservation achievement stands to see an enormous setback in the near future – many experts fear that losses to poaching could soon overtake births.

White, and black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis spp.*) numbering between 5,042 – 5,455 individuals are among the species most threatened by global poaching and resultant illegal trade. Poaching also looms large as a threat to African elephants and pangolins, as well as the three remaining Asian rhino species, greater one-horned, Sumatran, and Javan rhinos. The future needs for these other endangered species will also be discussed at the upcoming COP.

IRF Executive Director and IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group Red List Authority, Dr. Susie Ellis, and IRF Asian Rhino Program Coordinator and Chair of the IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group, Dr. Bibhab Talukdar, have been significant contributors to the [CITES COP briefing document](#) for rhino conservation, which will be distributed to all delegates. The report covers conservation and horn trade for each of the five rhino species, drawing numerous conclusions, including:

- Illegal horn trade has doubled since 2013 and is at its highest level in 20 years.
- South Africa remains the main source country for illegally traded horns.
- Mozambique is the primary country exporting rhino horn to consumer markets.
- Viet Nam is now the main consumer country, but there is little law enforcement by its authorities.
- The document recommends that China, including Hong Kong, be added to CITES' countries of Priority Concern, as there is good evidence that it has a significant market for illegally traded rhino horn. China has, however, shown more commitment in prosecution of rhino horn crimes than Viet Nam.
- South Africa, Mozambique, Viet Nam, and Zimbabwe are identified for priority attention from CITES. It is recommended that Namibia be added to this list due to its escalating poaching crisis.
- Of particular importance are the Asian rhino species (Javan, Sumatran, and greater one-horned or Indian rhinos), which are on a quiet path to extinction because of a lack of political will and reluctance to make difficult decisions needed for species recovery.

Eight important things you might want to know about CITES and wildlife trade:

- Global cooperation is essential for monitoring and regulating trade for critically endangered species, like rhino. Illegal wildlife trade involves multiple countries and enforcing laws across their shared borders.
- The US, the UK, and other countries have elevated wildlife crime to the same level as terrorism and other high profile international crimes.
- There are 182 country signatories to CITES. The Conference of the Parties (COP), as it is called, convenes every 3 years, and includes the signatory countries as well as NGO observers like the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), TRAFFIC, IRF, the Environmental Intelligence Agency (EIA), the World Wide Fund for Wildlife (WWF), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and others.
- CITES oversees international agreements on trade for more than 35,000 plant and animal species, based on specific criteria.
- CITES signatory nations are legally bound by COP agreements, which means that they must uphold CITES recommendations by enacting and enforcing their country's laws to control and manage wildlife trade.
- CITES breaks down the degree of trade regulation based on three CITES Appendices:
 1. Appendix I: all trade in these species is illegal because trade could lead to extinction (example: tigers)

2. Appendix II: these species are not necessarily immediately threatened with extinction, but unregulated trade could risk their survival in the wild (example: American ginseng)
 3. Appendix III: these species are listed because one country has asked CITES for assistance in controlling the trade (example: alligator snapping turtles in the U.S.)
- Black, greater one-horned, Javan, and Sumatran rhinos are afforded protection under CITES Appendix I. Trade in these species and their products is strictly prohibited for commercial purposes.
 - White rhinos (listed as Near Threatened on the [IUCN Red List](#)) are protected under Appendix II. This controls which exports should be allowed, based on two conclusions: the exporting country has determined that the trade complies with national laws, and that the export will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

How you can help:

- Ensure that governments are held accountable for their commitments as CITES signatories by writing to your legislators, or your country's national management authority contact ([found here](#)).
- For people living in the United States, write or call your congressional representatives ([search here](#)) urging more serious efforts to impose trade sanctions under the [Pelly Amendment](#), against countries that are not doing enough to block illegal wildlife trade. Pelly Amendment petitions are currently under review by the US government for Vietnam and Mozambique for their roles in illegal wildlife trade.
- Sign this [pledge](#) to demonstrate your commitment to saving rhinos.

Thank you, as ever, for your support and belief in our work. Stay tuned for more information from the CITES COP. IRF will be in Johannesburg later this month to be one of the many voices for rhinos. Follow our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) feeds for up-to-date reporting.

International Rhino Foundation

201 Main Street, Suite 2600

Fort Worth, TX 76102 USA

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