

Forum: Environmental Commission (EC)

Issue: Preventing Illegal Rhino poaching in Southern Africa

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Position: Deputy President



Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

My name is Alexandra Theodora Santaintidi and I am a 10th grader at Leonteios School of Athens. This year I have the utmost honor of serving as the Deputy President of the 8th ACGMUN. While participating in such conferences I came to realize the importance of diplomacy in today's world. MUN not only helps people improve themselves but also allows us to educate ourselves in topics that determine our future.

This study guide will provide you with information on the topic of Rhino poaching in the Southern parts of Africa. After reading it, you should further research the topic in order to prepare yourselves for the debate.

For any further questions don't hesitate to contact me at r.liori@gmail.com.

Best wishes,

Alexandra Santaintidi

Topic Introduction

Rhinoceroses have existed for millions of years in the southern parts of Africa and have been labelled as keystone species due to their crucial role in managing and regulating habitats by shaping landscapes and preserving biodiversity. They achieve this through their large consumption of vegetation, which prevents the overgrowth of certain plant species, such as woody shrubs and tall grasses. Additionally, their habit of wallowing in mud puddles causes these puddles to expand, deepen, and collect more water. As a result, valuable water sources are created, along with cooler and more liveable habitats that support the survival and safe breeding of other species, including insects, amphibians, and small aquatic animals.¹

¹ "Rhinoceros and Their Role in Ecosystems." *Rhino Resource Center*, www.rhino resource center.com. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

In recent years, the population of rhinoceroses has been decreasing rapidly due to poaching driven by the high and illegal demand for rhino horns. For example, between 2017 and 2021, the White Rhino population declined by 11.8%. This demand primarily originates from Asia, where rhino horns are mistakenly believed to have medicinal properties or are used as symbols of status and wealth. Illegal poaching threatens all five rhino species—three of which inhabit Asia and two in Africa. In Africa, the two species are the Black Rhino, *Diceros bicornis*, with a population of about 5,000 individuals living in savannas and shrublands, and the White Rhino, *Ceratotherium simum*, with approximately 17,000 individuals found in southern Africa. The three Asian species include the Indian Rhino, *Rhinoceros unicornis*, the Javan Rhino, *Rhinoceros sondaicus*, and the critically endangered Sumatran Rhino *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, found in Indonesia, with fewer than 80 individuals remaining.² Although all species are illegally hunted for their horns, White and Black Rhino horns are particularly sought after due to their larger size and heavier weight. African rhino horns weigh, on average, between 1.5 and 3.0 kg, with the White Rhino's horn reaching up to 4.0 kg.³ The continued decline of these species due to poaching will inevitably lead to their extinction if urgent conservation measures are not taken.

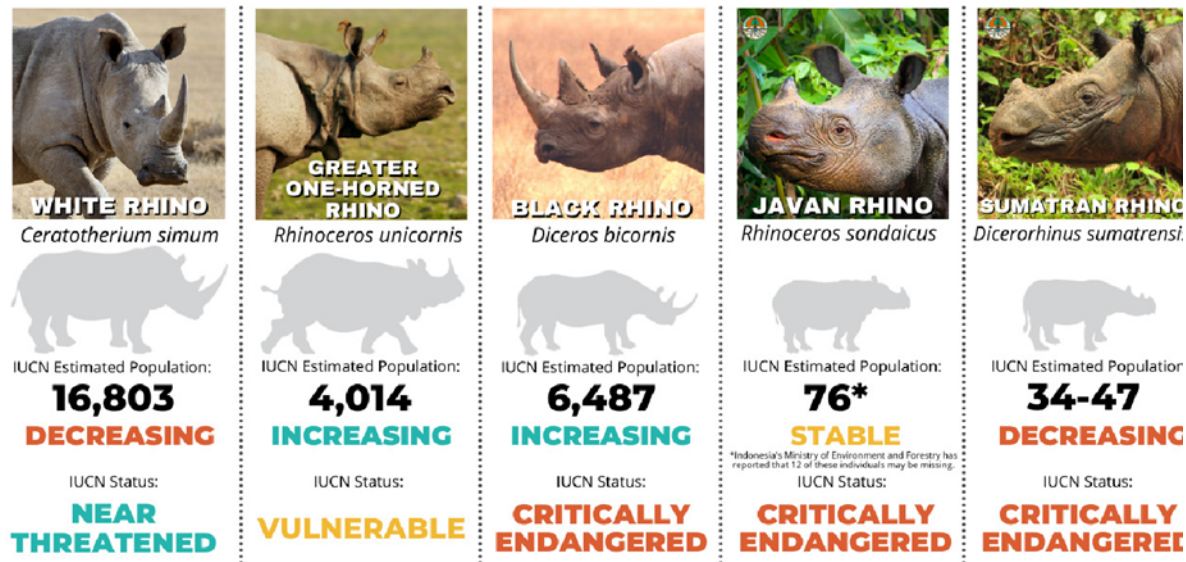


Figure 14: Poaching still threatens all five rhino species

Over the years, various attempts have been made to put an end to rhino poaching and the illegal horn trade. However, corrupt and unstable governments have historically played a minimal role in curbing the rise of poaching and illicit horn trafficking. These efforts were further undermined during

² "Rhino Populations." *International Rhino Foundation*, rhinos.org. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

³ *PoachingFacts | Truths from the Front-Line*, www.poachingfacts.com. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025

⁴ International Rhino Foundation, rhinos.org. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

and especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, as conservation priorities shifted away from protecting threatened wildlife species toward safeguarding human populations. This shift left wildlife-dependent communities in a vulnerable position.⁵ Despite recent anti-poaching initiatives, weak law enforcement remains a significant challenge.

Recent anti-poaching strategies, such as the use of technology for rhino monitoring and surveillance, as well as specialized training, have proven to be effective. However, they have also led to a significant increase in the demand for rhino horn due to reduced supply and its growing use in traditional medicine, resulting in higher black-market demand and prices. For example, in 2011, the price of powdered rhino horn ranged between \$33 and \$133 per gram. Between 2017 and 2018, the average price for raw rhino horn in Africa was approximately \$8,683 per kilogram, with prices ranging from about \$3,000 to \$17,000 per kilogram.⁶ This, combined with a decline in conservation efforts in recent years, has enticed many criminals and individuals struggling to make a living to engage in the illegal rhino horn trade.

Definition of Key Terms

Rhino Poaching

The catching and killing of rhinos without permission in order to collect their horns.⁷

Poacher

Someone who catches and kills animals illegally: Poachers hunt and kill the rhinos for their horns. The rangers' main job is to deter poachers.⁸

Rhino Horn

Rhino horns are similar in structure to horses' hooves, turtle beaks, and cockatoo bills. They are made of keratin – in rhinoceroses' horn, it is chemically complex and contains large quantities of Sulphur-containing amino acids.⁹

⁵ Corlett, Richard T., et al. "Impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Biodiversity Conservation." *Biological Conservation*, vol. 246, 2020, p. 108571.

⁶ *Wildlife Justice Commission*. "Black Business: Illegal Rhino Horn Trade Dynamics 2016–2018." [Wildlifejustice.org](https://wildlifejustice.org), 2019. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

⁷ *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

⁸ "Poacher." *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

⁹ *Save The Rhino International*, www.savetherhino.org. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

Illegal Trade

The activity of buying, selling or exchanging goods of specific merchandise when it's strictly prohibited.¹⁰

Rhino Horn Trade

The activity of buying, selling or exchanging rhino horns. The trade of rhino horns is mostly illegal.¹¹

Background Information

Rhino Poaching Escalation in South Africa

International Demand for Rhino Horns

In the past 20 years there has always been a soaring demand for rhino horns in the eastern countries, a fact that leads to the increased and illegal exploitation of rhinos in southern Africa. In the last decade, 9.396 rhinos have been poached across Africa, with an average of one rhino killed every 16 hours by poachers. More specifically, countries like China¹² and Vietnam¹³, have been playing the major drivers of illegal rhino poaching in southern Africa due to the fact that the horns have allegedly shown signs of curing illnesses such as severe fevers, rheumatism as well as even believed in some tribes to protect people from demon possessions.

From the 1970s to 1980s there has been a significant increase of demand for rhino horns. This increase stems from the notable growth in Asian countries' economies, which in turn leads to the increase of accessibility and usage of this rare medical component, as well as rhino horns becoming a status symbol in these countries.¹⁴ This drastic increase of demand has in turn led to the necessary increase of poaching to satisfy it. This became noticeable in the following years, such as 2010, when poaching in South Africa experienced a rapid rise, totaling 333 incidents. A similar trend was observed in 2015 when the number of rhinos poached reached an amount of

¹⁰ "ILLEGAL TRADE Collocation | Meaning and Examples of Use." *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, [oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

¹¹ Eikelboom, Jacco, et al. "Rhino Horn Trade: A Global Overview." *Global Conservation Report*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2021, pp. 45-58.

¹² Gao, Yanjun, et al. "Rhino Horn Trade and Its Global Impacts." *Journal of Wildlife Conservation*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2020, pp. 112-125.

¹³ "Rhino Horn as Medicine." *National Geographic*, 15 Jan. 2021, www.nationalgeographic.com. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

¹⁴ Baker, L., et al. "The Economic Growth and the Demand for Rhino Horn in Asia." *Asian Economic Review*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2019, pp. 157-168.

1,342 animals, highlighting the great threat illegal poaching poses to their persistence and survival¹⁵.

Illegal Harvesting and Trade

Due to the lucrative business of illegal horn trading for poachers as well as the growing demand for horns in East Asian countries, the market has surged to being one of the most profitable illegal trades around the world leaving, as a result, a negative impact on rhino populated areas.¹⁶ This is due to the fact that illegal horn trade significantly impacts the rhino population, leading to its decline and disrupting their ecosystem. It also requires a lot of financial and human resources for anti-poaching campaigns, putting immense pressure on authorities and conservation organizations. Moreover, it threatens cultural and national heritage. Thus, South Africa, which is the natural home of the majority of rhinos in the world,¹⁷ is now covered with rhino remains due to the poachers' aggressivity and methods containing shooting to kill. This illegal trade has facilitated the emergence of numerous criminal syndicates operating on a global scale. These syndicates control the process of illegal harvesting and trading, starting from the harvest of horns in southern African countries and later usually trafficked through Kenya, Mozambique and Tanzania until they reach their final destination of East Asia.¹⁸ Later, the horns are sold for outrageous prices due to high demand, where values can reach up to a \$100,000/Kg of rhino horn¹⁹, driving syndicates to continue their illegal operations.

Different Poaching Methods

Due to the huge monetary gain, poachers invented different ways to carry out operations where they dehorn rhinos.

Shooting with Firearms

Poachers employ rifles, shotguns and automatic weapons to shoot the rhinos. These shootings usually occur at night-time to avoid confrontation with law enforcement, although this method has shown to be less effective, since the loud gunfire not only alerts and attracts the

¹⁵ Ferreira, S., et al. "Poaching Trends in South Africa: A Rising Crisis." *Journal of African Wildlife Conservation*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2016, pp. 402-413.

¹⁶ "Wildlife Trafficking and Criminal Profits | Poaching Facts." *Save The Rhino International*, www.savetherhino.org. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

¹⁷ Leman, Mark. *Rhino Poaching and Conservation Efforts*. 2nd ed., Academic Press, 2023.

¹⁸ "The Hidden Trade: Illegal Rhino Horn Trafficking." *Environmental Investigation Agency*, www.eia-international.org. Accessed 4 Mar. 2025.

¹⁹ Gwynn Guilford. "Why Does a Rhino Horn Cost \$300,000? Because Vietnam Thinks It Cures Cancer and Hangovers." *The Atlantic*, The Atlantic, 15 May 2013,

authorities, but also frightens nearby rhino herds. Therefore, poachers often use silencers to minimize noise, helping them to avoid being detected by both animals and humans.²⁰

Poisoning Water or Food

To minimize the chance of getting caught the poachers practice a method of indirectly killing rhinos through poisoning their water sources as well as their nutritional sources. This method has shown to affect not only the rhino populations, but also a wide range of species that coexist with them. The contamination of water and food sources poses great threat to wildlife and local people who rely on these sources leading to health risks for humans and loss of biodiversity.²¹

Dehorning by Force

This is one of the most brutal ways poachers achieve their goal by using a variety of tools such as chainsaws and axes. Such tools are used to forcefully remove the horn while the animal is still alive. This action causes extreme pain and suffering to rhinos, extensive injuries that lead to increased blood loss, and eventually the slow death of the animal.

Environmental Impact

Rhinos play an important role in keeping the ecosystem in balance and in biodiversity because as grazers, they prevent grass overgrowth and as browsers control bush encroachment by feeding on small trees and shrubs. Additionally, by creating and maintaining open spaces they provide habitat for smaller animals. Therefore, rhino population decline, and possible extinction will result in loss of habitat shaping, decline in plant diversity as well as predators, scavengers and herbivores that rely on the habitat that rhinos maintain.

Challenges in Combatting Illegal Rhino Poaching

Lack of Public Awareness and Education

In some regions, such as Asia, where there is a very high demand on rhino horns due to their alleged value in medicine for curing diseases, such as cancer or treating fever, the severity

²⁰ Carlson, Kristopher. "In the Line of Fire: Elephant and Rhino Poaching in Africa." *Small Arms Survey Yearbook 2015: Weapons and the World*, Cambridge University Press, June 2015,

²¹ IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC). "Position Statement on the Threat Posed by Unregulated Use of Poison to Africa's Biodiversity, Ecosystems and Human Health."

Available at: <https://iucn.org/resources>, 2014.

of rhino poaching and its consequences on biodiversity and ecosystem balance is highly misunderstood. In such communities, where the level of education and awareness of broader environmental issues is very low, rhino protection and conservation have very low importance compared to immediate need for survival.

Wildlife Trafficking

The illegal trade of rhino horns due to their high medicinal property value in Eastern and South-eastern Asia black market, particularly in China and Vietnam, has led to significant marketing for rhino horns and subsequently to increased poaching and thus dramatic decline of rhino populations. Poachers supply criminal networks around Africa where organized syndicates through means of bribery, false documentation and corruption smuggle the horns to Asia. According to WWF's report in countries like Mozambique and Kenya, criminal syndicates often bribe customs officials to ensure the safe passage of rhino horns through ports and airports.²² Additionally, forging documents has been a well-known tactic employed by criminal syndicates in order to mask illegal shipments as other legal goods, such as sculptures or other wildlife products²³. In April 2017, the police were notified by DHL in Mozambique regarding a suspicious package bound for Vietnam, where its documentation stated that it contained three statues. These statues were fixed to solid bases. Inspection, however, revealed that all three bases, weighing 1.3 kg in total, were made from rhino horn.

Economic Reliance of Communities on Rhino Poaching

Limited job opportunities, rural poverty, lack of education and awareness in some regions drive people in vulnerable communities towards poaching and selling of rhino horns. Poaching is perceived as an alternative income source and a way to alleviate financial difficulties. A poacher might earn about \$10,000 per hunt but as the horn moves through the supply chain and reaches end consumers the horn price can escalate to thousands of dollars per kilogram. For

²² Zain, Sabri. "Corrupting Trade: An Overview of Corruption Issues in Illicit Wildlife Trade." *World Wildlife Fund*, July 2020, www.worldwildlife.org/pages/tnrc-introductory-overview-corrupting-trade-an-overview-of-corruption-issues-in-illicit-wildlife-trade.

²³ Moneron, Sade & Okes, Nicola & Rademeyer, Julian. (2017). *Pendants, Powder and Pathways: A rapid assessment of smuggling routes and techniques used in the illicit trade in African rhino horn*. Traffic Report

example, in 2018, the average rhino horn price in end consumers in Vietnam was reported to be \$16,595/Kg.^{24 25}

Ineffective Legislation

Many countries in Africa lack financial and human power resources to adequately cover and protect conservation areas and endangered species. Moreover, government corruption and ineffective legislation result in weak enforcement of anti-poaching laws, a factor that significantly contributes to an increase in rhino poaching. As a result, people in vulnerable communities continue poaching; believing the risk of getting arrested or punished is limited due to the minimal likelihood of capture.

From 2014 and onwards, significant steps have been made by different African governments to intensify anti-poaching laws aiming to protect endangered species, including rhinos. For example, the Kenyan government sent a strong message to poachers, illegal syndicates and all individuals involved in rhino poaching and horn trafficking stipulating that such actions would result in life imprisonment.²⁶ Later, in 2017, the African Union (AU) adopted a continental strategy to combat wildlife trafficking to protect endangered species, including rhinos. Among others, this strategy involved the engagement of local communities, regional cooperation, law strengthening and enforcement, and has laid the foundation for joint operations and better intelligence sharing among South African countries, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other neighboring nations in 2019. The anti-poaching efforts in South Africa and neighboring countries include stronger legal frameworks, penalties, engagement of community, and the use of technological innovations, such as microchipping, helicopter patrols and tracking devices.²⁷ The enforcement of anti-poaching strategies has led to a notable decrease in poaching rates and incidents. More specifically, in 2021, poaching rates in South Africa and neighbouring

²⁴ OECD (2019), *The Illegal Wildlife Trade in Southeast Asia: Institutional Capacities in Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam*, Illicit Trade, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/14fe3297-en>.

²⁵ Wildlife Justice Commission, "5. Value of Rhino Horn," in *Rhino Horn Trafficking as a Form of Transnational Organised Crime 2012–2021: 2022 Global Threat Assessment* (The Hague: Wildlife Justice Commission, 2022), <https://wildlifejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CHAP-5-Rhino-Horn-Trafficking-Report-v3.pdf>.

²⁶ "Sophisticated Poachers Could Undercut Bold Kenyan Fight against Wildlife Crime in This Key African Transit Country | Press Release | Kenya | Archive - U.S. Agency for International Development." *U.S. Agency for International Development*, 9 May 2016,

²⁷ United Nations Environment Programme, *Rhino Poaching: How Do We Respond?* (London: Department for International Development, October 2013), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a12e5274a27b20003e5/EoD_HD087_Oct13_Rhino_Poach_Response.pdf.

countries decreased significantly due to the implementation of stricter anti-poaching strategies, enhanced international support and the disruption of several international trafficking networks.²⁸

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States

Over the years, the United States have played an important role in combating rhino poaching and illegal trafficking of horns through international cooperation, fund raising, advanced technology provision, legislative support, wildlife protection laws like the Endangered Species Act and the Lacey Act that provide legal protection for wildlife, key actions like the Eliminate, Neutralize and Disrupt Wildlife Trafficking Act of 2016, which focuses on combating wildlife trafficking and partnerships with NGOs and African governments for enhancing the anti-poaching efforts through the provision of technology, funding and expertise.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been a key player in supporting wildlife protection efforts throughout and has implemented strict regulations that prohibit the sale and trade of rhino horns, such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES) and has supported wildlife conservation projects and provided funding in Africa aiming in increasing awareness, and targeting trafficking and consumer markets in Asia. It has been a leader in the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) and a major contributor to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), an international agreement adopted in 1973 that has been signed by 184 countries. It aims at ensuring that the international trade of wildlife animals and plants, including rhinos, does not threaten their survival; it classifies endangered species into categories, imposes regulations, requires permits and promotes sustainable international trade practices.

²⁸Department of Environmental Affairs, *National Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Report 2020-21* (Pretoria: Department of Environmental Affairs, 2021), https://soer.environment.gov.za/soer/UploadLibraryImages/UploadDocuments/180123120111_National%20Environmental%20Compliance%20and%20Enforcement%20Report_2020_2021.pdf.

Germany

Germany is a member of CITES and thus contributes to global conservation projects and efforts that aim to combat rhino poaching and control the endangered species trade, including rhinos. The German Development Agency (GIZ) works in favor of wildlife protection and strengthens law enforcement, whereas its domestic laws, such as the Federal Nature Conservation Act, prohibit illegal rhino horn trafficking and marketing to take place in the country.

Australia

As a member of CITES, Australia has been actively involved in global anti-poaching efforts and fighting against illegal trafficking. It supports international programs, provides funding in certain regions in Africa and collaborates with NGOs, like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Australia and the Wildlife Conservation Society aiming in strengthening law enforcement and surveillance in areas where wildlife illegal trafficking takes place.

Kenya

Due to the fact Kenya is the home of a significant rhino population; the nation has been actively involved in the protection of rhino populations. Kenya has been a strong advocate for CITES, is collaborating with international NGOs such as Wildlife Conservation Society and WWF, has established protected areas for rhinos such as the Laikipia-Samburu region and the Nairobi National Park, has been taking strong legal action against traffickers and syndicates and collaborates with neighboring countries like Uganda and Tanzania through the use of advanced technology, and sharing intelligence to combat poaching and trafficking.

China

China is the best example that highlights the complex challenge that conservationists face in balancing cultural beliefs and practices with wildlife conservation efforts. China has been one of the key players in the illegal rhino horn trade since rhino horn has been used for hundreds of years in traditional Chinese medicine. In 2018, 25 years following the ban on the use of rhino horn in medical treatments, the Chinese government announced its plans to lift this ban raising international concerns about the conservation of rhino populations due to the potential increase in poaching and illegal trade²⁹.

²⁹Kinnard, "In a Blow to Wildlife, China Lifts a Ban on the Use of Tiger and Rhino Parts," *World Wildlife Fund*, November 2018, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/in-a-blow-to-wildlife-china-lifts-a-ban-on-the-use-of-tiger-and-rhino-parts>.

Vietnam

Vietnam has also been recognized as an important factor contributing to illegal rhino horn trade because it is perceived as a status symbol of wealth and is valued for its believed medicinal properties. Despite international bans, Vietnamese consumers continue to seek rhino horns making Vietnam the largest market for rhino horn originating from both legally hunted and illegally poached rhinos in South Africa. Most importantly, there have been many cases where Vietnam has refused to implement the recommendations of the CITES Parties or even respond to requests for providing information³⁰.

Save the Rhino International

This organization, which was founded in 1994, has evolved from a small charity into a prominent entity raising 2,000,000 pounds a year to conserve rhinos and address the underlying causes of poaching and habitat loss. It works with experts such as ecologists, geneticists, zoologists and wildlife conservationists, it uses advanced technologies and collaborates with local and international partners for the survival of all rhino populations. It plays a significant role in the global fight against wildlife trafficking through CITES and other international frameworks³¹.

International Rhino Foundation (IRF)

The IRF organization was established in 1993 and is dedicated to the conservation of five rhino species (White, Black, Sumatran, Javan and Indian). It addresses important issues, such as poaching, illegal trafficking and trade, and habitat destruction through anti-poaching efforts and campaigns, awareness campaigns, research and monitoring. Furthermore, it collaborates with international organizations, such as CITES and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)³².

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT)

Founded in 1973, EWT is a registered non-profit, non-governmental and Public Benefit Organization, dedicated to saving threatened species, conserving habitats and ecosystems and

³⁰Environmental Investigation Agency. "Vietnam's Illegal Rhino Horn Trade: Undermining the Effectiveness of CITES ." Feb. 2013.

³¹ Save The Rhino International. "Poaching | Rhino Threats | Save the Rhino International." *Save the Rhino*, 2018, www.savetherhino.org/rhino-info/threats/poaching-rhino-horn/.

³² "Fighting for Survival." *International Rhino Foundation*, 29 Aug. 2018, rhinos.org/.

Gao, Yufang, et al. "Rhino Horn Trade in China: An Analysis of the Art and Antiques Market." *Biological Conservation*, vol. 201, Sept. 2016, pp. 343–347, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2016.08.001>. Accessed 19 Mar. 2019.

benefiting people in Southern and East Africa. It supports rhino populations and combats rhino poaching through its specialized Anti-Poaching Unit. It collaborates with CITES, other international bodies, NGOs, local governments and communities in order to protect species, support habitat restoration, improve laws and law enforcement and prevent illegal wildlife trade³³.

Blocs Expected

Countries in Favor of Rhino Poaching and the Trade of Rhino Horns

Some examples of such countries are Vietnam, China, Laos, Cambodia, Mozambique, Nigeria and Thailand.

Countries Against Rhino Poaching and the Trade of Rhino Horns

Some examples of such countries are Kenya, South Africa, United States of America, United Kingdom, India and Australia.

Timeline of Events

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS
1970-1980	Decline of rhino population due to poaching.
2010	South Africa experiences a drastic rise of incidents totaling 333.
2014	The south African governments intensify anti-poaching efforts with law enforcement
January 2017	The African Union adopts a continental strategy to combat wildlife trafficking.
2019	Increased collaboration among South African countries leads to better intelligence through sharing information and joint operations.

³³ “Endangered Wildlife Trust Home.” *Endangered Wildlife Trust*, 10 Dec. 2024, ewt.org/. Accessed 29 Jan. 2025.

2021	There is a decrease in incidents due to enforced anti-poaching strategies.
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Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties & Events

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 69/314

This resolution which was adopted in 2015 urged for global collaboration to combat illegal wildlife trade, including poaching and illegal trading of rhino horns. It called for stricter laws, enhancement of international cooperation, wildlife protection and awareness campaigns in order to disrupt trafficking networks and reduce rhino horn demand. The resolution calls for improved monitoring of trade routes, harsher penalties and emphasizes the role of CITES regarding implementation of its regulations. Its effectiveness has been inconsistent because enforcement varies across countries, and illegal trading continues to thrive in certain regions.

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 71/326

Adopted in 2016, this resolution also includes the points mentioned previously, but it places a great focus on combating illegal wildlife trading, including rhino poaching, highlighting the importance of the involvement of the private sector as well as the significance of biodiversity. Despite the fact that this resolution has led to global awareness and policy changes its effectiveness has been hindered by inconsistent implementation and enforcement across different countries, resulting in the persistence of illegal trade in many regions.

CITES RESOLUTION CONF. 9.14 (REV. COP17)

This resolution focuses on the conservation of rhino species, calls for combating illegal rhino horn trade and draws attention to the need of monitoring rhino population and illegal trade rates ensuring that CITES's data are always updated. This resolution has resulted in improved global collaboration and has motivated key countries to take action. Its effectiveness, however, has been restricted by limited and uneven implementation, inadequate enforcement in some regions, and mostly the ongoing, strong demand for rhino horns.

CITES RESOLUTION CONF. 11.18 (REV. COP18)

This resolution focuses on combating illegal trade of wildlife specimens, particularly live animals and calls for the closure of ivory markets. Although the resolution provides guidelines for safe transport,

accurate documentation and stronger enforcement, its effectiveness has been limited due to problems in enforcement, limited resources, and ongoing demand for rhino horns in illegal markets.

AFRICAN ELEPHANT AND RHINO MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

The MOU is an agreement between African countries aiming to enhance collaboration for the protection of rhinos and elephants. It provides a legal framework for action among African countries, international organizations and other stakeholders and promotes intelligence sharing and joint enforcement efforts ensuring the protection of wildlife. MOU has achieved a degree of collaboration and enforcement in some areas but its effectiveness has been hindered mainly by corruption and limited funding

IUCN AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP (AFRSG)

A scientific advisory body that plays a crucial role in monitoring African rhino populations and preventing their extinction from illegal poaching and habitat loss. It supports local communities, governments and organizations by providing research-based guidance for the protection of habitat loss and the implementation of measures against illegal poaching.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Project Rhino's Battle Against Poaching in Kwazulu-Natal Through Strengthening Of Surveillance

Enhancement of surveillance and security patrols have formed the primary strategy for combating rhino poaching and horn trafficking. Project Rhino has implemented both ground- and aerial-based monitoring on KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), a region in South Africa with significant rhino populations and high threats for illegal poaching. In 2011, under the Project Rhino banner, conservation agencies in KZN collaborated and established the Zululand Anti-Poaching Wing (ZAP-Wing) in order to monitor and protect rhino populations in this region³⁴. This effort was supported not only by the South African business and public community but also international donors, resulting in the formal launch of the Zap-Wing in November 2012. However, the persistent high demand for rhino horns in illegal markets as well as the limited resources and corrupted local authorities have prevented the complete eradication of illegal poaching.

³⁴"ZAP-Wing – the Zululand Anti-Poaching Wing." *Zapwing.org*, 2025, www.zapwing.org/. Accessed 29 Jan. 2025.

Anti-Poaching strategies in Kruger National Park

Aerial and ground-based monitoring and surveillance, implementation of detection dogs, foot patrols and military-trained anti-poaching units have been conducted by rangers in Kruger National Park in South Africa, which is one of the most heavily targeted areas for illegal rhino poaching. However, the park's vast size and its close proximity to Mozambique where criminal syndicates operate, hinder the ranger effort to protect the rhino population and eradicate poaching.

Education and Awareness Campaigns

Campaigns such as “Stop the trade” by WWF and “When the buying stops, the killing can too” by WildAid have been implemented in order to reduce the demand for rhino horn in consumer countries, such as Vietnam and China, to engage people from local communities in protecting and conserving the rhino populations, to form global partnerships and collaborations with international organisations such as the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) and CITES to promote global awareness, and to raise awareness through the social media, hashtag movements and celebrity engagement, among others, to promote the anti-poaching efforts and inspire people to actively and financially support rhino protection. The success of these campaigns, however, is often limited by various factors, such as cultural beliefs and increased profit from illegal trade. For instance, the success of such campaigns is hindered by cultural beliefs in countries like Vietnam, where rhino horn is a status symbol and is believed to have medicinal properties³⁵.

Intensification of Anti-Poaching Methods and Law Enforcement

Over the years these methods have involved the strengthening of law enforcement and legal frameworks to combat rhino poaching through stricter penalties, longer prison sentences, higher fines, and the establishment of CITES aiming in creating international laws to regulate rhino horn trade. Various organizations have implemented rhino poaching-specific strategies to address killing of animals and illegal trade. For instance, the Chengeta Wildlife organization founded in 2012 operates in the most challenging environments and provides equipment, supplies and anti-poaching training at every level, ranging from local governments to rangers. It is operated solely by volunteers that work towards the improvement or setting the conditions for efficient and fair law enforcement³⁶.

³⁵“Vietnam: Education for Nature - Vietnam.” *Save the Rhino*, www.savetherhino.org/programmes/education-for-nature-vietnam/.

³⁶“Chengeta Wildlife.” Chengetawildlife.org, 2023, chengetawildlife.org. Accessed 29 Jan. 2025.

Increased Collaboration Among South African Countries (SADC), Intelligence Sharing, Joint Operations

Since rhino poaching involves transnational criminal syndicates, poachers and traffickers operating across borders, countries, and especially South African countries, have increased collaboration and shared intelligence to combat poaching, and disrupt trafficking networks. An example is the Southern African Development Community (SADC) comprising 16 member states that have established joint task forces, and signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) involving joint protocols and operations, information sharing and support.

Possible Solutions

Increased Use of Advanced Surveillance Technology

It is important that advanced technology is being used in order to track and combat any illegal action against wildlife, including rhino poaching. Some examples of surveillance technology that could be used are satellite imaging and drones to not only better track the endangered wildlife but also identify the poachers and deter them. Drones equipped with thermal cameras, such those used in Kruger National Park in South Africa provide authorities with information to locate poachers even at night. These tools will be controlled from a central control center where rangers will receive real-time alerts. Local communities can also report suspicious behaviors and incidents there. This technology will be funded and maintained by governments and conservation groups in order to ensure long-term success.

Rhino Dehorning

Over the past years an anti-poaching measure driven by the illegal rhino horn trade that has been proposed is the rhino dehorning which involves the removal of the horn under local anesthesia and specialized equipment, such as a chainsaw. This procedure makes rhinos become less attractive and of no value to poachers. If performed in a controlled environment it does not kill the animal and the horn regrows over time. However, it can be a stressful procedure for the animals, it can cause trauma and disturb the animal's natural defense against predators. Last but not least, this action somehow normalizes horn removal as some may believe that horns are actually not necessary for the animal. Thus, dehorning may be viewed as an excuse to normalize horn removal leading to reduced efforts of protection and conservation.

Legalizing and Regulating Rhino Horn Trade

Legalization and regulation of rhino horn trade is a highly controversial and debatable issue. Proponents argue that the sustainable harvesting of rhino horns in regulated farms without harming the animal could help weaken the black market, provide funding for conservation efforts, and economic benefits for local communities. This could ultimately result in loss of market control by criminal syndicates. Opponents, however, believe that such actions would increase the overall demand for rhino horns, create difficulties in regulating and enforcing law and provide cover for illegal trade since distinguishing legal horns from poached ones would be challenging.

Collaboration with Scientists to Find Alternative Solutions

Collaboration between medical experts and scientists would be a critical step for the decrease of rhino poaching considering the fact that the rhino horn is mostly used for medical purposes. By working together, medical experts and researchers can develop alternative treatments using synthetic keratin or plant-based substances. These treatments can be promoted as effective and ethical alternatives. Thus, the collaboration with such medical experts can benefit from finding a substitute to the keratin structure commonly found in rhino horns, which would significantly reduce its value and lower the demand, making poaching less profitable.

Stricter Penalties for Poachers and Traffickers

Today while the maximum sentence for illegal poaching is 25 years, many get off scot-free or with miniscule fines that don't deter the criminals due to the fact that reward out scales the punishment. Enforcement of higher fines, mandatory prison sentences, and asset seizures can help deter poachers. Governments must strengthen laws, while law enforcement and conservation groups have to work together in order to ensure that penalties are properly applied. International cooperation is also crucial to dismantling trafficking networks.

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