

# New Report Shows the Rise of Environmental Crime Worldwide



Interpol and UNEP recently released a report on the rise of environmental crime 'from illegal trade in wildlife to the dumping of hazardous waste' across the globe. The report finds that such crime is vastly expanding and increasingly endangering not only wildlife populations but also entire ecosystems, sustainable livelihoods and revenue streams to governments.

Although the definition of 'environmental crime' isn't universally agreed on, it's often understood as a collective term to describe illegal activities harming the environment and aimed at benefitting individuals or groups or companies from the exploitation of, damage to, trade or theft of natural resources, including:

- Corporate crime in the forestry sector
- Illegal exploitation and sale of gold and minerals
- Illegal fisheries/fishing
- Trafficking in hazardous waste and chemicals
- Threat finance using wealth generated illegally from natural resources to support non-state armed groups and terrorism.

By some estimates, the value of environmental crime makes it the fourth largest crime in the world after drug trafficking (\$344 billion USD), counterfeit crimes (\$288 billion USD) and human trafficking (\$157 billion USD).

Of course, unlike other types of crime, environmental crimes are aggravated through their additional cost and long-term impact on the environment. For example, deforestation, dumping of chemicals and illegal fisheries cause loss of ecosystem services such as clean air and clean water, extreme weather mitigation, food security, and even health and wellbeing.

The report examines the root causes of environmental crime in general and its rise in recent years. It then provides five recommendations on how to combat it:

1. **Reduce threats to security and peace.** Strengthen the information collection, analysis and sharing, across sectors, in peacekeeping missions, Sanctions Committees and across the UN as a whole on the role of natural resource exploitation in conflicts and security to inform holistic

responses towards securing peace, security and sustainable development.

2. **Rule of law.** The international community must recognize and address environmental crimes as a serious threat to peace and sustainable development, and strengthen the environmental rule of law at all levels to prevent safe havens, including disrupting overseas tax havens, improving legislation at international and national levels, and implementing dissuasive penalties, substantial sanctions and punishments, to enhance the enforcement and adjudication capacities in the area of environmental crime.
3. **Leadership.** Governments should establish central coordination and national cross-sectoral plans, with unity of command and unity of efforts, in coordination with the relevant UN entities, INTERPOL, and other relevant international treaty bodies and institutions, as appropriate, to combat the involvement of criminal organized groups in environmental crimes.
4. **Financial support.** Call upon the international development community to recognize and address environmental crime as a serious threat to sustainable development and strengthen the financial support to relevant agencies and national, regional and global law enforcement efforts against environmental crimes, such as information and analysis, inter-agency collaboration, enforcement, prosecution and the judiciary, especially in developing countries and fragile states.
5. **Economic incentives and consumer awareness.** Strengthen economic incentives, relevant institutions and consumer awareness.