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Environmental crimes increasing according to the UN

A new report by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and Interpol has highlighted the sophistication and growth of environmental crimes across the world. These crimes range from the illegal trade of wildlife, illegal mining, illegal forestry and fishing. And despite our growing global attention towards conservation, these crimes have jumped 26 percent in the past two years alone.

The report highlights the criminal fluidity of these trades. They say that transnational crime rings are no longer focusing on just one flow of illicit trade; rather, "criminals coordinate, evade or even shift their focus from drugs, human trafficking, counterfeit products and arms to any new opportunity – hazardous waste and chemicals, forest products, pangolins, giant clams, minerals and illegally extracted gold."

According to the UNEP, the reasons behind this rise is linked to both increasing demand, primarily in Asia, as well as poverty in the regions where the smuggling of these goods take place. Local wildlife authorities across Africa, which often scrape by on a minimal budget, must constantly adapt to new methods and new extremes employed by poachers.

In Uganda, for instance, rangers are often set out on night patrols in national parks that are roughly the size of Estonia. They walk in small groups through dangerous territory inhabited with elephants, lions, hyenas, leopards and hippos with only a rifle for protection. These rifles, according to the rangers, are only to be used in case of a charge or attack by a predator, and even then they only shoot in the air, not at the animal.

Yet despite these good intentions, poachers often come with sophisticated transport, night vision, heavy firearms and trackers. Poachers come ready for a fight and it is not uncommon for conservationists and rangers on patrol to give their lives protecting these animals.

The report says the international community must step forward and do more: "The sheer financial scale and sophistication of environmental crimes now require an entirely different scale of coordinated responses and international collaboration, working across ministries and jurisdictions."

Image credit: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/education/>

Read more: <http://www.care2.com/causes/environmental-crime-growing-at-astonishing-rate-says-un-report.html#ixzz4BSHQm5nr>

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