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Environment

# Ban on domestic ivory trade passes at international summit

- Not legally binding but may stem trade and poaching
- Nearly one third of Africa's savanna elephants killed between 2007 and 2014
- Ban negotiations spurred feud

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A Kenyan ranger guards a stack of elephant tusks, intercepted before entering the illegal ivory trade. A new domestic ban was backed by most of the 217 members of the IUCN and may help save elephants that are now rampantly being poached. Photograph: Tony Karumba/AFP/Getty Images

Nations and environmental groups have agreed to shut down the domestic ivory trade, despite the resolution nearly being derailed by objections from countries including Japan and South Africa.



**Push for ban on domestic ivory trade spurs feud at international summit**

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Following three days of political maneuvering, disagreements and walkouts, delegates at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) congress in Hawaii agreed on a text that calls on countries to close the internal trade of ivory "as a matter of urgency".

The motion holds no legal power but conservationists hope it will spur countries to ban the sale of ivory within their own borders, to help stem the rampant poaching of elephants. The international trade in ivory has been banned since 1989 but in many countries, including the US, UK and China, domestic trade is still allowed for antiques.

"The shutting down of domestic ivory markets will send a clear signal to traffickers and organized criminal syndicates that ivory is worthless and will no longer support their criminal activities causing security problems in local communities and wiping out wildlife," said Cristian Samper, chief executive of the Wildlife Conservation Society.

"The movement behind Africa's elephants gives us all hope and will ensure that the elephant will continue to be a vital part of Africa's magnificent natural heritage."

The domestic ban was backed by most of the 217 state and national members of IUCN, as well as 1,000 conservation groups that are part of the union. But a band of countries, including Japan, Namibia and South Africa, argued that domestic markets should be better regulated rather than shut down.

It was hoped that consensus would be achieved on Saturday, only for Japan and Namibia to propose a number of amendments that would have watered down the resolution so it would merely call for nations to regulate themselves.

However, representatives from countries including Uganda, Cameroon and Kenya spoke forcefully in favor of a ban. A majority of delegates then voted in favor.

Andrew Wetzler, deputy chief program officer at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said he hoped that a meeting of nations at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) in Johannesburg later this month would reinforce the commitment to close domestic ivory markets.

"Today's vote by IUCN members is the first time that a major international body has called on every country in the world to close its legal markets for elephant ivory," he said. "It's truly a landmark moment, and a victory for elephants."

The first continent-wide census of Africa's savanna elephants found that nearly a third were wiped out between 2007 and 2014. Poachers target the animals to supply ivory from their tusks in Asia. Gangs can get $1,100 per kilogram for ivory in China, which announced last year it would shut down its own domestic market.

Even though the international trade in ivory has been banned for more than 25 years, a flourishing black market has led to the slaughter of elephants, as well as the people charged with protecting them.

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