Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 17, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eric H. Holder
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary, Mr. Attorney General, and Madam Secretary:

As Co-Chairs of the Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking, you are charged with developing and implementing a National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking. As you are well aware, the current poaching and wildlife trafficking crisis is severely impacting communities and species globally and has become within our national security interest to help quell. We appreciate the efforts thus far of the Task Force to respond to Executive Order 13648.

We are writing to ensure that the National Strategy the Task Force produces is bold, goal-oriented and implemented through a whole-of-government approach. An important objective of the Task Force is to create greater coordination between existing activities of the various agencies working on wildlife trafficking, while also bringing new agency partners to the table to strengthen the U.S. Government response. We also believe for the National Strategy to be effective it must include elements to dismantle illicit transnational networks, incorporate security and intelligence resources, and ensure local security forces have the capacity to combat poaching.

The linchpins of illegal wildlife trafficking are the large-scale criminal syndicates that enjoy significant profits because of the strong demand for rhino horns and elephant tusks. These criminal organizations most often utilize existing drug, arms, and human trafficking networks and infrastructure to successfully move wildlife products to market. We must combat wildlife trafficking networks with similar methodologies, tools, and resources as other illicit networks. An effective National Strategy must include strong elements aimed at breaking up these wildlife networks, with a focus on high-level personnel within the networks, as well as clear and measurable indicators to measure progress.

There are clear connections between criminal wildlife trafficking activities and threats to national security interests in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. General James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, noted in his March 2013 Worldwide Threat Assessment that "illicit trade in wildlife…threatens to disrupt the rule of law in important countries around the world. These criminal activities are often part of larger illicit trade networks linking disparate actors – from government and military personnel to members of insurgent groups and transnational organized crime organizations." Given the evidence and implications of this connection, we would like to

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see the National Strategy actively engage and utilize the security and intelligence resources of the U.S. Government in providing solutions. The scale of criminal financing through wildlife trafficking operations has risen to unprecedented levels, and the National Strategy should strive to employ the best intelligence, data, and technology at our disposal in order to combat it.

Additionally, the National Strategy should identify steps to build capacity of law enforcement systems in key countries, including the training and equipping of government eco-guards and rangers, and use of technological innovations. To ensure effectiveness, programs must include methods to aggressively deal with the pervasive corruption that prevents effective wildlife law enforcement in many countries. Another portion of the strategy should focus on building prosecutorial, judicial and investigative capacity to prosecute wildlife crime cases more effectively.

As you enter the final stages of developing the National Strategy, we urge you not only to rely on traditional conservation approaches, but to produce a strategy that strongly reflects the criminal, financial, and security aspects of wildlife trafficking and contains ambitious measures to address them. Failure to do so will inevitably limit the effectiveness of the U.S. response and do little to properly combat wildlife trafficking and poaching.

We thank you for your leadership on this issue and for your attention to our suggestions. We look forward to reviewing the forthcoming National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking and working with you on this critical issue going forward.

Sincerely,

CHRIS COONS
Chairman
Subcommittee on African Affairs
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

EDWARD R. ROYCE
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

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