

IVORY WARS

Elephant slaughter continues in Africa. This spring, 22 dead elephants were found in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Conservation groups say the newest wave of African elephant poaching and subsequent ivory exportation is now militarized, no longer limited to subsistence poachers just trying to make a living.

At the site of the mass elephant killings in Garamba Park, the poachers had taken the animals' tusks, but no meat. Normally, a local subsistence poacher will take some of the meat to feed his family. Furthermore, according to a *New York Times* article (Sept. 3, 2012) by Jeffrey Gettleman, there were no tracks at the scene, no sign that the poachers had hunted the elephants from the ground.

Scientists, park officials and the Congolese authorities now agree that the Ugandan military is responsible for the massacre at Garamba. Evidence shows that after members of the Ugandan military killed the 22 elephants from a helicopter, they took the animals' ivory tusks—worth more than a million dollars US—to sell on the black market. The latest round of poaching highlights Africa's latest "conflict resource."

Conflict resources are natural resources extracted from fighting zones, easily converted to cash, with the money used to continue the conflict. The term "conflict resource" emerged in the late 1990s with the United Nations (UN) General Assembly over the use of "blood diamonds" in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone endured a particularly violent civil war between 1991 and 2000 with members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attempting to overthrow the government. Financing for the RUF, and especially

for its weapons, came from the illicit trade of diamonds from the country's mines. As Liberia also experienced a civil war from 1989 to 2003, it was the main route for exporting those "blood diamonds" from Sierra Leone.

Blood diamonds were exported around the world and were bought and sold just like any other diamonds. In 1998, the UN passed a resolution to halt the trade of blood diamonds and ensure buyers their diamonds did not contribute to violence.

According to Gettleman's article, like the RUF in Sierra Leone, some dangerous armed groups in Africa have begun trading in illegal elephant ivory to fund their continued conflicts. The Lord's Resistance Army, a notoriously ruthless group led by Joseph Kony, the al-Shabab Somali militant organization, and the Janjaweed who are armed Arabs hailing from the Darfur region of Sudan, have all been accused of using ivory to buy weapons.

But some of the groups implicated in the

tained the ivory, they enlist organized crime syndicates to export it around the world. These mafias count on weakened states and their corrupt officials to move the ivory.

Experts in illegal ivory say almost 70 percent goes to China. The Chinese have had a love affair with ivory for centuries. With the advent of China's new middle class, many more Chinese can finally afford it. Not that it is cheap. On the streets of Beijing, ivory sells for US\$1,000 a pound and is used for everything from chopsticks, rings and bookmarks to cups and combs, according to Gettleman. Without China's demand for ivory, officials at the U.S. State Department agree that Africa's elephant poaching would likely cease.

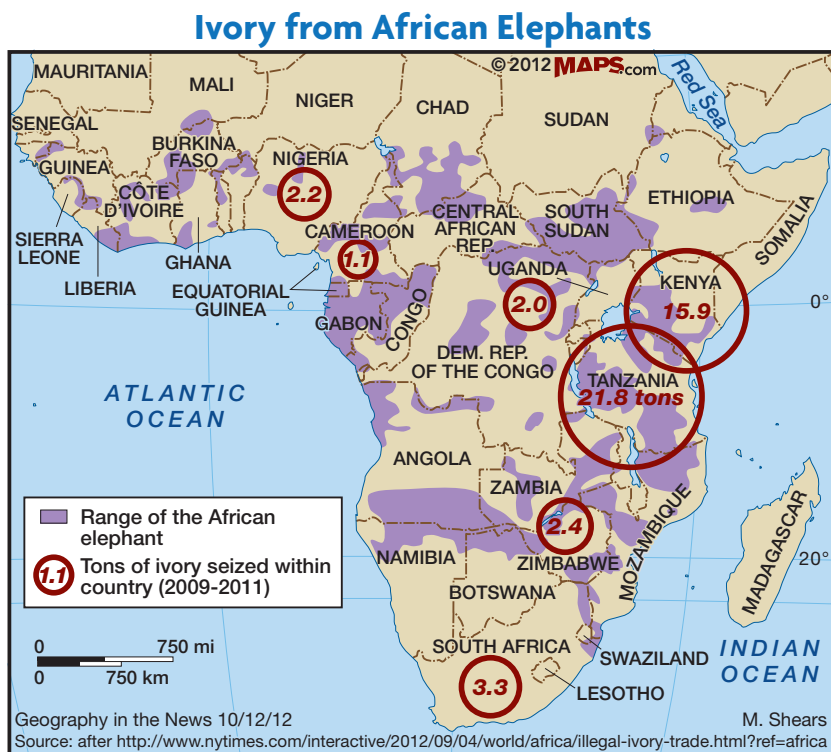
For 2011, Africa's elephant poaching levels were the highest since records began in 2002. The amount of illegal ivory seized worldwide was a new record at 38.8 tons (35 metric tons), which equals the tusks from more than 4,000 dead elephants. The latest round of poaching may rival that of the 1980s when poachers decimated Africa's elephant population by half before an international ban made the trade illegal.

While West Africa's large elephant populations have already disappeared, those in Central and East Africa are also vanishing. Exact numbers are difficult to obtain, but officials believe that tens of thousands of elephants are killed for their ivory every year. Garamba once boasted 20,000 elephants. In 2011, it had 2,800.

Park rangers in Garamba are doing their best to save the last remaining elephants in the park. The 140 rangers carry assault rifles, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades and claim to "shoot first," when dealing with poachers. Sometimes they find the poachers are Congolese government soldiers.

Nevertheless, real change will have to come from China. As long as the demand for elephant ivory remains high, poaching will continue. With the desire to acquire a small piece of "white gold" may eventually come the annihilation of a species.

And that is *Geography in the News*™. October 12, 2012. #1167.



illegal ivory trade are even more disturbing—they are members of African armies. Armies like the Ugandan military, the Congolese Army and recently independent South Sudan's military are poaching elephants and selling their ivory. These armies, as well as others, receive strong support from the United States. In fact, the U.S. government uses millions of U.S. taxpayers' dollars to train and fund these militaries yearly. Most of the soldiers are poaching just to make a quick buck, Gettleman said.

Once these groups and others have ob-

Sources: GITN #712, "African Waterfight: Elephants vs. Humans, Jan. 23, 2004; Gettleman, Jeffrey, "Elephants Dying in Epic Frenzy as Ivory Fuels Wars and Profits," *New York Times*, Sept. 3, 2012; and Bryan Christy, "Blood Ivory," *National Geographic*, Oct. 2012 (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/10/ivory/christy-text>)



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