LMI: Asia’s Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking

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BACKGROUND

The illegal wildlife trade is a multi-billion dollar business threatening the Lower Mekong region’s unique ecosystems and robbing the people who depend on them for the benefits they provide. It presents both security and economic threats by undermining law enforcement, strengthening criminal syndicates and raising the risk of diseases being transmitted from animals to humans. Illegal traffickers are well organized. They prey on endangered species, move them across borders and sell them around the world.

USAID’s program to counter illegal wildlife trafficking began in 2005 with the establishment of the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN). The network has achieved significant outcomes that include:

- Training more than 2,200 officials in anti-poaching operations and wildlife crime investigations;
- Increasing the amount of seizures ten-fold of illegal wildlife and associated arrests in just four years;
- Establishing a fully functioning secretariat in Bangkok; and
- Creating National Task Forces to combat wildlife crime in Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) countries—Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam—and in almost every ASEAN country.

ASEAN member governments recognize the importance of wildlife trafficking and have committed the financial and human resources essential to enforcing legislation governing wildlife conservation, trade and sustainable use of wild fauna and flora. Likewise, they have agreed to implement regional commitments to ASEAN-WEN focusing on cross-border collaboration on wildlife crime cases.

APPROACH

Target Countries: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam

USAID’s five-year program, Asia’s Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking (ARREST), began in April 2011 and builds on the success of ASEAN-WEN. Implemented by the FREELAND Foundation, ARREST unites the efforts of government and the private sector (profit and non-profit) to fight trafficking of illegal wildlife in Asia by reducing consumer demand,
Public awareness booth teaches youth about endangered wildlife species by organizing games and contests at the Laos Boat Race Festival in Vientiane, in October 2011.

Elevating law enforcement in wildlife crime: ARREST places wildlife crime on the agenda of major national and regional law enforcement organizations, such as INTERPOL and ASEANAPOL—the ASEAN region’s police network. ARREST supports these efforts and helps police chiefs across the Lower Mekong region incorporate cross-border wildlife enforcement cooperation into their work plans.

Law enforcement capacity building: ARREST works with law enforcement trainers and institutions in the region to improve regional and national courses and materials in the areas below.

- **Prevention:** Protected area enforcement
- **Detection:** Nature crime investigation, forensics, and border inspection
- **Prosecution:** Judicial awareness

Supporting the ASEAN-WEN Secretariat: ARREST program experts mentor staff from ASEAN-WEN’s Bangkok-based Program Coordination Unit, and share new technologies to raise law enforcement awareness. This creates a stronger, more independent and service-oriented secretariat that connects directly with law enforcement agencies across the Lower Mekong region and in other countries.

Promoting regional cooperation: Through regional events such as knowledge exchanges, regional investigation meetings and training courses—officers from the Lower Mekong countries share information, intelligence and best practices with the new South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network (SA-WEN), China’s Task Force, and ASEAN-WEN.

**PARTNERS**

**Implementing Partner:** FREELAND Foundation