



For immediate release

## Elephant Poaching and Illegal Ivory Trade Out of Control Proposed Ivory Sales Increase Threat to Conservation Efforts

**Washington, DC: March 11, 2010:** A new report released today exposes large-scale illegal ivory trade in Tanzania and Zambia on the eve of the opening of the meeting of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Doha, Qatar on Saturday March, 12. Both Tanzania and Zambia have proposed selling their ivory stocks despite intensive elephant poaching and illegal ivory trade within their countries.

The report “**Open Season – The Burgeoning Illegal Ivory Trade in Tanzania and Zambia**” is being released by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), a non-profit group based in Washington, DC and London. EIA undercover investigators recently visited Tanzania and Zambia and returned with harrowing first-hand evidence documenting a flourishing trade in illegal ivory in both countries, often exacerbated by official corruption.

Tanzania’s elephant population declined by more than 30,000 elephants between 2006 and 2009, primarily from poaching to supply black-market ivory to Asia. Rampant poaching is concentrated around the Selous Game Reserve where 40% of Tanzania’s elephants are located. In 2009 several major seizures totaling some 12 tons of ivory occurred in Asia. DNA studies from earlier seizures of Tanzanian ivory in Asia has shown that much of the ivory originated from the Selous.

“Time after time, CITES actions to allow supposedly limited ivory sales stimulate a massive escalation in elephant poaching and ivory smuggling all across Africa,” said Allan Thornton, President of EIA. He continued, “The only thing accomplished by these legally sanctioned ivory sales beyond enriching Chinese and Japanese ivory merchants, is to imperil elephant conservation and provide legal market cover for smuggling and laundering of poached ivory.”

In February 2010, EIA investigators posing as buyers easily found ivory for sale in the markets of Dar es Salaam, identified hotspots for illegal ivory trading in southern Selous, and gathered data on recent poaching incidents. In one village near the Selous Reserve, a poacher dug up his cache of tusks and offered them for sale. The investigators were forced to flee when the poachers became aggressive, and were pursued on motorbikes fitted with exhaust silencers, the same vehicles often used to move ivory around the area.

In Zambia, EIA investigators found that despite the ban on domestic sales, ivory is easily obtainable in large quantities, and often purchased by Chinese nationals. The report also reveals that the country has a thriving illegal domestic market and is at the centre of the international ivory trade, hosting some of the world’s most sophisticated traders and networks – which in some instances use government military vehicles to transport illegal ivory.

“Every time CITES approves an ivory sale it translates into an open hunting season on elephants across Africa and a death sentence for tens of thousands of protected elephants,” said Samuel LaBudde, a biologist with EIA. “It would be a tragedy for elephants and a travesty of conservation principles for CITES to approve Tanzania and Zambia’s applications to downlist protections for elephants.”

The full extent of the illegal ivory trade in these countries is documented in the new EIA report *Open Season: The Burgeoning Illegal Ivory Trade in Tanzania and Zambia*, and available online at: [www.eia-global.org](http://www.eia-global.org).

**For further information, interviews or to obtain copies of undercover video from the field investigations contact Allan Thornton or Samuel LaBudde at EIA, Washington, DC: (202) 483-6621.**