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PRESS RELEASE
19 March 2010

UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN TIGER PARTS IN SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE, 19 March 2010 – A 3-month undercover investigation by ACRES (Animal Concerns Research and Education Society) has revealed that 59 out of 134 jewellery and antique shops visited in Singapore offered alleged tiger parts for sale. Evidence of the 59 shops selling alleged tiger parts was recorded on video.

Approximately 159 alleged tiger claws, 303 alleged tiger teeth and 38 pieces of alleged tiger skin were found on sale during the investigation, which was conducted from December 2009 until February 2010. Tiger parts are used for various purposes such as traditional medicine, jewellery, lucky charms and novelties.

Singapore has previously been recognised as playing a role in the trade of tiger products from neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, for both domestic trade and international re-exports.[1]

Although all commercial tiger trade has been banned since 1987 by CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), which Singapore is a party to, there has been an approximate 50% decrease in wild tiger populations since the ban.

Less than a century ago, more than 100,000 tigers roamed the world's jungles and forests. Today, less than 3,200 remain in the wild. Three subspecies of tiger have become extinct within the last 50 years and, despite the inclusion of Asian big cat species in Appendix I of CITES, the illegal trade in specimens of nearly all these species has escalated and further threatens their long-term survival in the wild.

Singapore joined CITES in 1986 and ratified the Convention in 1987. The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority is the CITES authority in Singapore. AVA administers the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act (ESA), which lists all CITES species in its Schedules. Under the ESA, it is an offence to import, export and re-export any CITES species without a permit from AVA. The possession, sale, offering or exposing or advertising for sale or displaying to the public of any illegally imported CITES specimen is also an offence. The penalties, on conviction, are a fine of $50,000 (per species), not exceeding an aggregate of $500,000 and/or 2 years imprisonment.

Under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) (Prohibition of Sale) Notification, the domestic sale of tiger specimens is prohibited. Any person who sells, offers or exposes for sale or displays to the public any tiger parts and products, commits an offence. The offender shall be liable to a fine not exceeding $10,000 for each species (but not to exceed in the aggregate $100,000) or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 1 year or to both.

"It is important to note that anyone who advertises for sale any tiger parts contravenes the above Act, **even if the products turn out to be not authentic**. By making a claim that the product is from tigers, the dealer is potentially driving up the demand for tiger parts, which directly contravenes the spirit of CITES and the local legislation meant to enforce CITES" said Ms. Anbarasi Boopal, Director of ACRES Wildlife Crime Unit.

1. *Chris R. Shepherd and Nolan Magnus, 2004. Nowhere to hide: The trade in Sumatran tiger. A TRAFFIC South-east Asia report.*

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Key findings of the investigation include:

- The demand for tiger parts and the amount of tiger parts being stocked by the shops appeared to be higher over the Chinese New Year period in this year of the tiger, as reported by a shopkeeper.
- At 52 shops, the alleged tiger parts were openly on sale.
- 28 shopkeepers mentioned that an order for more tiger parts could be placed with them, and the delivery time ranged from one week to three months or more.
- 7 shopkeepers recognised that tigers are protected animals, that it is illegal to sell tiger parts, and that tiger parts are customs-controlled items.
- The alleged tiger parts were claimed to originate from Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, China, Myanmar, Indonesia, Lao and Cambodia.

"The investigation findings showed the presence of an illegal trade in alleged tiger parts in Singapore and that there is an immediate need for continued serious efforts to curb this illegal trade. The investigation findings and footage have been submitted to the AVA and we look forward to working closely with the AVA" said Mr. Louis Ng, Executive Director of ACRES.

"As long as there is demand, there will be supply. Legislation alone is insufficient to bring a complete halt to the illegal trading of endangered species and their parts. We must do more public education and awareness so demands for them can be curbed and supply will then terminate" said Dr. Lim Wee Kiak, Member of Parliament for Sembawang GRC.

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<u>Notes to editors</u>

- Photographs and video footage of the investigation are available on request.
- In 2003, ACRES, in collaboration with The New Paper, conducted undercover investigations into the illegal trade in tiger parts in Singapore. The investigations revealed that alleged tiger parts, including tiger bones, tiger paws and tiger penises, were on sale at Traditional Chinese Medicine stores in Chinatown.
- Between 2008 and 2009, ACRES received 3 tip-offs regarding the sale of alleged tiger parts in Singapore. ACRES investigations confirmed alleged tiger parts being sold as lucky charms in all three cases. Enforcement action by the Agri-food and Veterinary Authority followed.
- ACRES is a local animal protection charity and Institution of Public Character aimed at fostering respect and compassion for all animals. It currently has more than 18,000 individuals on its supporter database.