



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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UNITED STATES BANS ELEPHANT IVORY FROM BURUNDI,
URGES SIMILAR PROHIBITIONS BY OTHER COUNTRIES

The United States today banned the importation of elephant ivory from Burundi because of the recent discovery of a substantial quantity of illegal ivory in that country that may enter world markets.

Today's action was taken by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which also announced it may impose a similar ban in the future on ivory from any other country that trades in the illegal Burundi ivory.

The U.S. ban has been prompted by the discovery of a substantial amount of elephant ivory in Burundi that has not been registered under an international control system set up by the 95-nation Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Convention). Fish and Wildlife Service officials believe much of this ivory was poached and soon will be marketed internationally if prohibitions are not imposed immediately.

The Convention and independent sources recently confirmed the discovery of approximately 16,000 elephant tusks (85 metric tons) in private ownership in Burundi, a nation in East Africa. These tusks were reportedly imported before Burundi banned such imports in November 1987 and have not been registered under the Convention's control system for ivory.

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Because Burundi has no wild elephants and no ivory-producing country has authorized ivory exports to that country since the control system began in December 1986, Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement officials believe this ivory stockpile was obtained illegally.

When the Convention's control system began, the trade of stockpiled ivory was allowed if it was registered with the Convention by December 1, 1986. At that time, a predecessor government in Burundi registered 18,148 tusks (89.4 metric tons); the Convention allowed it into trade to clear existing inventories and to allow the new control system to begin.

The Burundi ivory that prompted today's action by the United States has accumulated since that time. Because Burundi indicates it can take no legal action against ivory brought in before its own ban, the United States has announced today's policy to guard against that illegal ivory entering this country. The United States also has urged that other countries adopt similar prohibitions.

As part of that recommendation, Fish and Wildlife Service officials indicated today that emergency provisions of the U.S. Endangered Species Act will be invoked to ban all ivory imports from any country that accepts the illegal Burundi ivory, whether in raw or worked form, and whether as imports or for reexport to third countries.

An estimated 760,000 elephants remain in the wild in Africa, down from approximately 1.5 million a decade ago. Ivory poaching and degradation and disappearance of habitat have been blamed for this decline.

African elephants are listed as a "threatened" species by the United States Government and as an "Appendix II" species under the Convention treaty. Under those provisions and the Convention's control system, legal trade in African elephant ivory and other products is allowed under certain quotas. Raw tusks from legally killed elephants must be marked to distinguish it from poached ivory. (Asian elephants, a different species, are listed as an "endangered" and "Appendix I" species and commercial trade is not permitted. Certain scientific and zoological uses of Asian elephants are allowed under permit.)

A more complete discussion of today's action by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service appears in the April 29, 1988, Federal Register.