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Intelligence-led Forensic Science: Combatting the Illegal Ivory Trade Amidst a Burgeoning World Market

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ABSTRACT

Major transnational organized crimes have increased dramatically in the past decade, coincident with massive increases in legal containerized cargo shipped worldwide. The illegal ivory trade is no exception. I will describe our use of genetic tools to identify the locations of Africa's major ivory poaching hotspots, as well as the number, scale and connectivity of the major transnational criminal organizations smuggling ivory out of Africa. These tools enable law enforcement to target the illegal ivory trade before the contraband enters transit where it becomes far more difficult and expensive to trace. They are also empowering financial crime investigations into these into these criminal networks, which is one of the most powerful tools available to identify, interdict, disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal organizations, as per Presidential Executive Order 2b (February 9, 2017).

BIO:

Samuel Wasser holds the endowed chair in Conservation Biology at the University of Washington, where he is a Professor in the Department of Biology and Director of the Center for Conservation Biology. His lab is world renown for pioneering highly accessible noninvasive genetic and physiological tools for monitoring human impacts on the environment over large spatial scales, including the use of detection dogs. His forensic work is best known for using DNA to track changes in major elephant poaching hotspots across Africa over time, as well as the connectivity between the major transnational criminal organizations trafficking large quantities of ivory out of Africa. His forensic work involves collaboration with numerous national and international government organizations, including the US Department of Homeland Security Investigations, CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Kenya's Directorate of Criminal Investigation and the World Bank.

