

Social media and the ivory ban: Myanmar and China cross-border trade

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From 31 December 2013 to 2 January 2014, we conducted a survey of the ivory trade in the town of Mong

La, Myanmar, on the border with China. We counted 3,300 pieces of carved ivory and 49 whole tusks. Mong La is situated in the autonomously controlled Special Region 4, which has a strong cross-border trade. While Mong La is situated in Myanmar its population is largely Chinese, so is its currency, the Chinese yuan, its mobile phone and electricity network, and it operates at Beijing time (1.5 hours ahead of the rest of Myanmar).

We wrote a short report on our findings that was uploaded on 13 January 2014 on the TRAFFIC webpage and sent out to media contacts. The story was covered well by the media, and sparked several original reports in various outlets. An error was introduced by the Associated Press on 14 January, reporting that 30 instead of 49 tusks were observed, and this was taken over by other media sources.

On 16 January 2014 a petition was uploaded on the Care2 petition website demanding that Myanmar and China instigate a crackdown on the sale of ivory to save the elephants. The author of the petition was Sue Lee, someone we do not know and have not been in contact with. The text of the petition is shown on page 98.

Note that more errors were introduced, including that Mong La and the eastern Shan State are now situated in China. Myanmar does indeed hold the second largest population of *Asian* elephants but not of all elephants, and some sweeping statements ‘... no form of government control to stop the sale of ivory throughout China and other Asian countries’, could do with a bit more nuance, but overall the statement described correctly the current situation concerning ivory trade in the Myanmar–China border area.

On 4 February 2014, we extracted the names of the first 50,000 signatories of this petition. Care2 allows the author of a petition to determine the end point of the petition and the option to download details of the petition including a list of all the signatories. We did not have this option available to us. However, Care2 allows any reader to scroll down to see the signatures.

This allowed us to copy them and, in batches of ~500, to paste them into a database. The name, country, date, time (Pacific Standard Time – this is followed here) and number are transferred as one string and the comments, if any, in another. When signing the petition one can choose to not disclose their name, but the other details (country, date, etc.) remain visible. One must include a prefix (Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr). Searches were done using wildcards where appropriate (China would be searched using Chin* — this retrieves China but also Chinese) or alternative names (Myanmar vs Burma) and checked manually (thus excluding Mrs. Roshchina from Russia when searching for China).

The first signatory signed on 16 January at 14:25 hours and that same day another 139 people signed, at a rate of ~15 persons/hour. This increased slightly to ~20 persons/hour the following day, and then gradually started decreasing to 5 and 1 person/hour the next two days. From 21 to 24 January inclusive, less than 10 people signed the petition per day, and this continued to 25 January when only 2 people signed the petition in the early hours of the day. By that time 1,019 people had signed the petition. Then at 21:04 hours the petition went viral through postings on Twitter and Facebook (all with links to the petition site) and within 10 minutes over 200 additional people had signed. The following days between 5 and 15 people signed the petition every minute, lowering to 1 signing every three minutes until on 4 February signature there were 50,000 signatures.

For 1,865 (3.7% of total) signatories the names were not disclosed. Some 1,472 (2.9% of total) had a doctorate; of the 93.3% petitioners that disclosed their sex 34,341 (73.6%) were female. It was not possible to quantify the countries from where the signatories originated as they were part of a string, but by manually scrolling through it we tallied more than 130 countries (34 on the first day alone). All but one (Bhutan) of the Asian elephant range States were included on the list as well as 19/37 African range countries (the absentees

Demand that Myanmar and China crackdown on the sale of Ivory and save the Elephants!!

author: [SUE LEE](#)

target: Asian Governments Throughout and near China

signatures: 49,975

49,975

50,000

we've got 49,975 signatures, help us get to 50,000

sign now

share my signature on Facebook

By signing, you accept Care2's Terms of Service

Your email and postal address will remain private

Having problems signing this? Let us know.

overview | petition

Please sign and share this petition worldwide in an effort to stop the untimely death of elephants being murdered for their ivory.

In China, it's illegal to kill elephants for their ivory and sell their tusks. But somehow, 30 tusks and thousands of pieces of ivory were recently discovered for sale at a market in Mong La. Investigations into wildlife monitoring and trafficking noted that this market could be one of the biggest unregulated ivory markets in Asia. How could this be if laws exist? Ivory is openly displayed at this market in the Eastern Shan State of China to cater to the many tourists that visit. There is obviously no form of government control to stop the sale of ivory throughout China and other Asian countries.

The problem has also reached epidemic levels in Myanmar, considered as the second largest elephant population area worldwide, just after India. It is believed that about 6,000 elephants in the wild still roam the lands of Myanmar. It has laws forbidding trade in endangered species, but violations are rampant, especially in remote border regions. The laws need to be more strictly enforced!

Please sign and share this petition worldwide in an effort to stop the untimely death of elephants just so their ivory can be sold worldwide. We need China and Myanmar to crackdown on the illegal sale of ivory in our efforts to protect the elephant.

you have the power to **create change.**

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were mostly francophone elephant range countries). It is worth noting that 51 signatories were from China, 73 from Hong Kong, 8 from Macao and 47 from Taiwan (combined this represents 0.4% of the total); 4 were from Myanmar.

Some 2,852 (5.7%) signatories added a comment, ranging from a series of exclamation marks to 500-word essays. Twice as many commenters referred to China than they did to Myanmar or Burma (405 vs 172). In terms of species, 25 comments refer specifically to African elephants (or elephants in Kenya, Tanzania) whereas only 10 refer specifically to Asian (or Indian) elephants; many more simply mentioned elephants. Thirty-seven commenters linked the ivory trade to the trade in rhino horn.

With reference to what needs to be done or solutions to curb the trade, 3.9% noted a need for better regulation of banning the trade altogether: 81 people recommended a (global) ban on wildlife trade, with an additional 12 referring to CITES and 14 to policing or increased regulation. Furthermore, 24 recommend the destruction (or crushing or burning) of stockpiles and 13 commenters refer to virtues of tourism as an alternative source of income.

No fewer than 229 (0.5%) mention the need for better law enforcement or increased legislation, pointing out that the act of selling ivory is criminal and therefore effective prosecution is needed. A minority pointed to the need to boycott products from countries trading in ivory, 16 times in specific reference to China or Chinese products and 5 times in reference to Myanmar.

Tackling the illegal trade in ivory in Asia, Africa and, indeed, elsewhere is a complicated issue and one that is unlikely to be addressed by simply signing an online petition, but observing the large number of people that feel compelled to do something and reading through the comments, we found it evident that this is an issue that goes to the heart of biodiversity conservation and people's idea of what is just in an increasingly globalized world. We for one were surprised to see this emerging response to one of our ivory surveys and hope that the combined efforts of many will lead to positive results.