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WORLD ANIMAL JUSTICE (WAJ)  
EXPERT REPORT

# ANIMALS AND CRIME CONVERGENCE: THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN VARIOUS FORMS OF ANIMAL EXPLOITATION AND ORGANIZED CRIME NETWORKS

Why animal protection must be  
integrated into global crime  
prevention and criminal justice  
frameworks

Prepared ahead of the 15th  
United Nations Crime Congress





***“Animal exploitation is not isolated. It intersects with broader transnational organized crimes. Yet animals remain largely the invisible victims of global criminal networks.”***

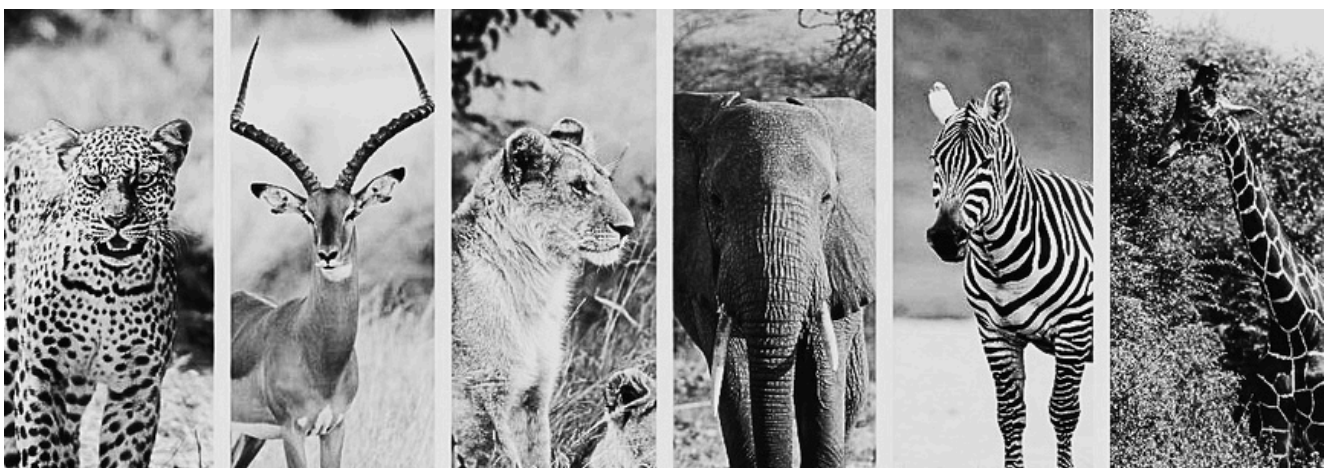
***World Animal Justice***

This report is an advocacy document that examines the interconnections between various forms of animal exploitation—including wildlife trafficking and live animal export—and transnational organized crime networks, notably drug and arms trafficking.

It maintains analytical nuance where evidence remains context-dependent and avoids treating all cases of wildlife trade or live export as inherently linked to broader criminal syndicates.

At the same time, it argues that the existing body of evidence on crime convergence is now sufficiently substantial to warrant the full integration of animal exploitation into global crime prevention and criminal justice frameworks.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Animal exploitation—whether through illegal wildlife trafficking or lawful industrial practices such as live animal export—is increasingly intersecting with transnational organized crime systems. While these sectors are usually addressed separately in legal and policy frameworks, available evidence demonstrates that both can operate within, and contribute to, broader criminal ecosystems.

Wildlife trafficking is increasingly recognized not only as an environmental offence but as a specialized area of organized crime that shares routes, facilitators, techniques, corruption channels, and financial mechanisms with other illicit markets. By contrast, live animal export remains regulated primarily as an agricultural and commercial activity, even though emerging evidence indicates that livestock vessels can create concealment opportunities for narcotics trafficking.

Taken together, these two sectors reveal a broader structural reality: animal exploitation—whether illegal or legal—can provide entry points, concealment opportunities, infrastructure, routes, and operational advantages for organized crime networks.

This report demonstrates that:

- Wildlife trafficking is frequently embedded within diversified criminal portfolios, intersecting with drug trafficking, arms circulation, corruption, and financial crime;
- Live animal export, while lawful, can create operational environments exploitable for illicit trafficking, particularly because of inspection constraints, opaque logistics, and regulatory gaps; as well as by the same nature of the trade, which creates insalubrious environments that prevent the inspections to be fruitful, due to the amount and stench of the organic waste created during the operation itself.
- Both systems rely on shared routes, actors, infrastructures, and financial mechanisms, forming part of a wider continuum of crime convergence.

For the 15th United Nations Crime Congress, the policy implication is clear: animal exploitation should no longer be treated as peripheral to organized crime analysis. Addressing animal-related crimes in isolation risks overlooking the criminal systems that sustain them and weakens the effectiveness of crime prevention, enforcement, and justice responses.



## GENERAL INTRODUCTION: FROM SECTORAL ISSUES TO SYSTEMIC CRIME CONVERGENCE

Animal-related activities are still predominantly approached through separate policy lenses. Wildlife trafficking is framed as a conservation issue, while live animal export is regulated as part of agricultural and maritime trade. This compartmentalized approach does not reflect the operational realities increasingly observed in many regions.

In practice, both illegal and legal forms of animal exploitation intersect with transnational organized crime systems. They rely on shared infrastructures of transport, corruption, financial exchange, logistical concealment, and regulatory weakness. In many contexts, they form part of diversified illicit economies or create conditions that can be exploited by such economies.

Current legal and policy frameworks remain largely sector-specific. CITES plays an indispensable role in structuring lawful wildlife trade, but its underlying logic is principally one of trade regulation rather than criminal-system disruption. By contrast, UNTOC is designed to address organized criminal structures, including “organized criminal groups” and “serious crime” where offenses are transnational in nature. The present gap is therefore not merely operational but conceptual: animal-related activities are still too rarely addressed through the organized-crime lens when the evidence points to systemic convergence.

This report therefore adopts a systems-based approach. Part I examines wildlife trafficking as a component of organized crime networks. Part II extends the analysis to live animal export, demonstrating how a lawful trade can also intersect with and facilitate illicit trafficking.

For UN Crime Congress delegates, the central point is not simply that animals are harmed within these systems—although they are—but that animal exploitation can function as a structural component of crime convergence. It must therefore be integrated into the prevention and disruption of transnational organized crime.

# PART I – WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING WITHIN TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL SYSTEMS



Wildlife trafficking is often addressed as a conservation issue centered on biodiversity loss, endangered species, poaching, and illegal trade. While this framing remains valid and necessary, it does not fully capture the broader criminal dynamics within which wildlife trafficking frequently operates. In many contexts, wildlife trafficking is not an isolated offense but part of more complex systems of transnational organized crime, intersecting with narcotics trafficking, arms circulation, corruption, money laundering, territorial control, and exploitative labor practices.

This Part examines wildlife trafficking through that wider criminal lens. It shows that wildlife trafficking can function as a component of diversified criminal portfolios, an operational testing ground for broader trafficking routes, and a source of financing and control within unstable or weakly governed environments. Understanding these interconnections is essential if crime prevention strategies are to move beyond sector-specific responses and address the criminal infrastructures that sustain illicit trade across markets.

## 1. FROM CONSERVATION ISSUE TO ORGANIZED CRIME REALITY

Wildlife trafficking is most often described through the lens of biodiversity loss and species decline. While this framing captures the ecological urgency of the issue, it obscures another dimension that is central from a criminal justice perspective: its integration within transnational organized crime systems.

In practice, wildlife trafficking rarely operates in isolation. It intersects with other illicit markets and relies on shared infrastructures of transport, corruption, financial exchange, and route-testing comparable to those used in drug trafficking, arms circulation, and other organized criminal activities. This is why treating wildlife trafficking only as a conservation or compliance issue risks missing its function within wider criminal portfolios and the institutional blind spots such systems exploit.



As a result, wildlife trafficking continues to be treated as a sector-specific issue, despite operating in many contexts as part of diversified illicit economies. For crime prevention actors, this is a critical blind spot. Where wildlife trafficking is treated only as a conservation offense, broader organized crime structures may remain intact and undisturbed.

## 2. STRUCTURAL INTERLINKAGES WITH DRUG TRAFFICKING

### 2.1. CONVERGENCE OF ILLICIT MARKETS

Organized crime groups increasingly operate across multiple illicit markets, shifting activities according to profitability, enforcement pressure, and operational opportunity. Wildlife trafficking is frequently integrated into these diversified criminal portfolios.

Empirical and institutional data confirm this overlap. Individuals involved in narcotics trafficking are often also implicated in wildlife crime (Sollund & Maher, 2015; South & Wyatt, 2011). According to RENCTAS, approximately 40% of criminal groups engaged in wildlife trafficking are also involved in other illicit activities, particularly drug trafficking (Cardamone, cited in TRAFFIC). Europol similarly identifies shared networks and routes linking wildlife trafficking and narcotics flows (Europol, 2011; Europol, 2025).

This demonstrates that wildlife trafficking should not be viewed as marginal to organized crime. It is often embedded within broader criminal economies and should be analyzed accordingly in threat assessments, operational planning, and inter-agency coordination.

### 2.2. OPERATIONAL CONVERGENCE

Convergence is not only organizational but operational. Wildlife products and narcotics are frequently transported within the same shipments, allowing criminal groups to maximize logistical efficiency and distribute enforcement risk. In some cases, wildlife itself is used as a concealment mechanism, including documented instances of live animals transporting drugs internally (South & Wyatt, 2011; Sollund & Maher, 2015).



Seized narcotics products illustrating the global scale of illegal wildlife trafficking and international enforcement efforts. Credit: Long Visual Press/Alamy Stock Photo,

**Trafficking routes also overlap. Corridors first used for wildlife trade may later be reused for narcotics once logistical pathways, corruption channels, and enforcement weaknesses have been tested. This reflects a core operational logic of organized crime: once a trafficking infrastructure is established, it becomes available for multiple commodities.**

**For criminal justice policy, this means that wildlife seizures should not be assessed narrowly as isolated environmental incidents. They may indicate the presence of broader trafficking infrastructures relevant to drugs, arms, corruption, and financial crime.**

### **2.3. INTEGRATED CRIMINAL ENTERPRISES**

**In some cases, convergence becomes materially integrated within a single criminal enterprise. The “lion cake” case in South Africa is particularly illustrative. Authorities reportedly discovered a product derived from lion bones used in traditional medicine that also contained opium, thereby combining wildlife and drug trafficking within one production chain.**

**This case shows that criminal markets do not merely overlap; they can become substantively intertwined. Commodities, production processes, and distribution systems may all be integrated within a unified criminal model. This has important implications for investigations: seemingly sector-specific wildlife crimes may in fact be components of more complex organized criminal enterprises.**



## 2.4. BARTER AND NON-MONETARY SYSTEMS

Wildlife trafficking also intersects with drug markets through barter systems. A well-documented example is the exchange of abalone for methamphetamine in South Africa. Such arrangements bypass formal financial channels, making them difficult to detect, trace, and regulate.

This illustrates that illicit economies are not strictly monetized or compartmentalized. Commodities themselves can function as currencies. For investigators and policy-makers, this underscores the need to move beyond conventional financial tracing models and to recognize non-monetary exchange systems as part of organized crime analysis.

## 2.5. WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING AS ENTRY POINT INTO ORGANIZED CRIME

Wildlife trafficking may also function as a lower-risk entry point into organized crime. Criminal groups can use it to test trafficking routes, assess enforcement capacity, and establish corruption networks before expanding into higher-risk markets such as drugs or weapons.

From a prevention perspective, this is highly significant. Wildlife trafficking can serve as an early warning signal of broader criminal activity. Treating it as a minor offense or a niche environmental problem risks missing opportunities for early intervention against emerging organized crime networks.





### 3. LINKS TO WEAPONS, VIOLENCE, AND HUMAN EXPLOITATION

Wildlife trafficking is also linked to violence, insecurity, and human exploitation. In some contexts, it has contributed to the financing of armed groups, including during the Sudan conflict and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Hart & Mwinyihali, 2001; Biswas, 2013; Cardamone). Illegal firearms are widely used to poach protected species, control extraction areas, protect stockpiles, and secure shipments. These links place wildlife trafficking within broader systems of coercion and territorial control.

These linkages also matter at the level of governance. Where trafficking networks operate through corruption, coercion, and the circumvention of regulatory systems, they do not merely benefit from weak governance; they reproduce and deepen it, undermining state authority, institutional integrity, and the rule of law.

Wildlife trafficking also contributes to the consolidation of trafficking corridors in regions characterized by weak governance and porous borders. Over time, these corridors may support the circulation of multiple illicit commodities, including drugs and weapons.

In addition, evidence indicates the use of forced and exploitative labor in the extraction of wildlife products, including rhino horn, marine species, and medicinal plants. This demonstrates that wildlife trafficking is embedded not only in environmental harm but also in broader systems of violence and human exploitation.

For UN Crime Congress delegates, the implication is direct: wildlife trafficking should be understood not only as an offense against nature, but also, in many contexts, as a contributor to insecurity, exploitation, and criminal consolidation.



**Wildlife products seized during law enforcement operations against illegal wildlife trafficking.**

Credit: AP Photo/Brennan Linsley, Endangered Species Warehouse Photo Gallery.



**Poached rhinoceros showing the devastating impact of illegal wildlife trafficking on endangered species.**

Credit: Hein Waschefort, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported (CC BY-SA 3.0).



## 4. IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIME PREVENTION

The convergence of wildlife trafficking with other forms of organized crime challenges fragmented enforcement approaches. Wildlife authorities, narcotics units, financial investigators, customs services, and anti-corruption bodies often work in parallel rather than in integrated fashion. This institutional fragmentation limits the capacity to identify interconnected criminal systems.

Effective responses therefore require a shift toward prevention and systems-based analysis. Weak sanctions, limited asset confiscation, corruption, insufficient intelligence-sharing, and regulatory asymmetries all contribute to making wildlife trafficking a relatively low-risk activity for organized crime.

The financial dimension is equally central. Proceeds from wildlife trafficking may be laundered through legitimate sectors such as timber, fisheries, wildlife farms, tourism, and related commercial structures. Following the money is therefore indispensable not only to understanding wildlife trafficking itself, but also to identifying the broader criminal architectures, facilitators, and front structures that sustain converging illicit markets.

The core policy shift is clear: responses must move from commodities to systems. The relevant questions are not only what is trafficked, but who enables the routes, who facilitates corruption, who launders the proceeds, and who benefits from the system.

### TRANSITION TO PART II

If wildlife trafficking demonstrates how illegal animal exploitation can be integrated into organized crime systems, a further challenge emerges when examining lawful forms of animal exploitation.

Part II shows that live animal export, despite its legal status, can generate operational conditions that facilitate illicit trafficking. This extends the logic of crime convergence beyond illegal markets and into the legal economy itself. For UN Crime Congress delegates, this is particularly important: organized crime does not only infiltrate illicit sectors; it also exploits lawful industries that provide cover, infrastructure, and concealment opportunities.



# PART II – LIVE ANIMAL EXPORT AND CRIMINAL CONVERGENCE: AN EMERGING VECTOR FOR ILLICIT TRAFFICKING

## INTRODUCTION TO PART II

Live animal export is a legal global trade involving the maritime transport of livestock—primarily cattle, sheep, and goats—across regions and continents. Although generally framed as an agricultural and commercial activity, emerging evidence indicates that this trade is increasingly intersecting with transnational organized crime, particularly drug trafficking.

Unlike wildlife trafficking, which is largely illegal, live export operates within a lawful framework. This creates a structurally distinct but equally significant risk: the convergence of legal and illegal markets within the same logistical systems. Available evidence suggests that livestock vessels are being used as concealment platforms for narcotics because of their particular operational characteristics, including the large number of animals transported, extreme sanitary conditions on board, and the limited capacity of authorities to conduct effective inspections.

Although the available documentation remains limited and uneven, multiple inspections, seizures, and investigative reports point to a growing pattern. This emerging convergence raises serious concerns for crime prevention, maritime security, and regulatory oversight.

## 1. STRUCTURAL VULNERABILITIES OF LIVE EXPORT VESSELS

### 1.1. A LEGAL TRADE WITH CRIMINAL VULNERABILITIES

Live animal export consists of the transport of livestock—primarily cattle—by sea over long distances, often between continents. Major routes include shipments from South America to the Middle East, as well as exports from countries such as Chile to China. Across South America, this trade is expanding rapidly. Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay, and Chile are currently active exporters, while countries such as Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Ecuador have announced plans to enter the market. Notably, even landlocked countries are investing in this sector despite the additional logistical costs involved, which reflects its strong economic attractiveness.



This expansion is taking place despite longstanding concerns relating to animal welfare, environmental impacts, maritime safety risks, and public health implications. More recently, an additional and particularly serious dimension has emerged: the use of livestock vessels in drug trafficking operations.

This assessment is supported by a combination of investigative reporting, enforcement observations, and expert analysis, which, while still limited in scope, consistently point toward an emerging convergence dynamic.

## **1.2. A LAWFUL TRADE WITH SYSTEMIC EXPOSURE TO CRIMINAL CONVERGENCE**

Live animal export is a lawful global trade involving the long-distance maritime transport of livestock—primarily cattle—from exporting regions such as South America to markets in the Middle East and Asia. The sector is expanding rapidly, including in countries without direct maritime access, which further illustrates the strength of the underlying economic incentives.

Despite its legal status, the structure of this trade presents systemic vulnerabilities that extend well beyond animal welfare concerns and create conditions conducive to criminal exploitation. These vulnerabilities include severe and widely documented animal welfare problems; aging fleets, often more than 30 to 40 years old, with corresponding risks of mechanical failure, fires, and shipwrecks; environmental and public health impacts, including pollution and contamination risks; the widespread use of flags of convenience, often associated with jurisdictions exercising limited regulatory oversight; and fragmented and uneven enforcement of international maritime and animal welfare standards.

These structural concerns are reinforced by major maritime incidents associated with the sector. In the webinar materials, live export was described as a high-risk trade marked by serious accidents, including the 2015 Barcarena sinking in Brazil and the 2009 Danny F II disaster near Lebanon, both cited as only two of many illustrations of the sector's systemic risk profile.

Taken together, these elements contribute to weakly regulated operational environments that can be exploited within broader transnational trafficking systems.



### **1.3. OPERATIONAL CONDITIONS ENABLING CONCEALMENT**

Beyond these structural weaknesses, livestock vessels present operational characteristics that significantly complicate inspection and detection. Large numbers of live animals, including sick, injured, and dead animals, combined with intense stench, waste accumulation, humidity, and the need for protective suits and breathing equipment, can materially reduce the effectiveness of vessel searches and detection methods such as sniffer dogs.

These conditions have direct operational consequences. In particular, the intensity of odors significantly reduces the effectiveness of detection tools, including sniffer dogs, while the density and condition of the cargo make systematic searches structurally constrained and in practice systemically limited to conduct effectively. As documented in multiple inspections, these constraints create an environment in which illicit substances can be concealed with a comparatively low risk of detection.

### **1.4. CONCEALMENT DYNAMICS AND EVOLVING TRAFFICKING METHODS**

The convergence between live export and illicit trafficking is further reinforced by adaptations in smuggling techniques. Earlier maritime trafficking methods often relied on attaching illicit cargo to vessel hulls by means of ropes, magnets, or other fastening systems. More recent evidence indicates a shift toward internal concealment within livestock vessels, taking advantage of precisely the operational conditions described above.

This evolution reflects a broader pattern of criminal adaptation, whereby trafficking methods are adjusted in response to enforcement practices and detection technologies. In this context, livestock vessels offer a particularly advantageous combination of high cargo complexity, limited inspection capacity, predictable international routes, and weak regulatory oversight in certain jurisdictions. These elements make them especially suitable for integration into diversified trafficking operations, where legal maritime trade infrastructures are leveraged to facilitate illicit activities.

Overall, the vulnerabilities associated with live animal export are not incidental but structural. They arise from the intersection of regulatory gaps, operational constraints, and evolving criminal strategies, thereby positioning livestock vessels as an emerging and still under-examined vector within transnational organized crime systems.



## 1.5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL EXTERNALITIES

Live export operations also generate broader environmental and social impacts. These include air and sea pollution, risks associated with ballast water contamination, negative effects on coastal tourism, and public health concerns linked to vessel conditions. While these issues are not directly linked to organized crime, they contribute to the broader governance weaknesses surrounding the sector and reinforce the case for heightened scrutiny of live export operations as a whole.

## 2. CONVERGENCE WITH DRUG TRAFFICKING: MODUS OPERANDI AND EVIDENCE

### 2.1. EVIDENCE FROM INSPECTIONS AND SEIZURES

Several vessels have been intercepted in European waters under suspicion of drug trafficking but later released following inspection, largely because of the operational constraints created by conditions onboard. The Neameh and FM Spiridon were inspected in Spain in 2020, yet no narcotics were detected despite severe sanitary conditions and high mortality among the animals, both of which significantly hindered the inspection process. Similarly, the Mawashi Express was detained and inspected in 2023 under comparable suspicions before being released without confirmed findings. A critical turning point came with the Orion V in March 2023, where cocaine was discovered onboard.

Taken together, these elements indicate not only a pattern of use, but the emergence of a structurally exploitable trafficking model, in which the operational characteristics of livestock vessels are systematically leveraged to reduce detection risk within transnational supply chains.

The evidentiary basis for this emerging pattern should, however, be stated clearly. In the live-export context, the present analysis relies on a combination of expert assessment, inspection narratives, investigative reporting, and media documentation, rather than on a consolidated body of judicial decisions or official global datasets.



## 2.2. A BROADER MARITIME CONTEXT

Drug trafficking through maritime routes is not new. It has long been documented in container ships, fishing vessels, and fruit cargo transport. Investigations confirm that maritime transport is widely used across vessel types, with livestock vessels now emerging as a specific vector. Measures should be introduced to prohibit the deactivation of GPS tracking systems, as periods without signal create critical gaps in oversight, during which vessel movements, stops, and onboard conditions—including those affecting transported animals—cannot be effectively monitored or verified.

Taken together, these elements indicate that the convergence between live animal export and drug trafficking is not anecdotal, but structurally plausible and increasingly evidenced, even if detection remains constrained by the very conditions that make these vessels attractive to criminal networks.

## 3. A DISTINCT FORM OF CRIME CONVERGENCE: LEGAL-ILLEGAL INTERFACE

### 3.1. FREQUENCY AND EMERGING PATTERN

Available evidence suggests a recurring pattern of suspicion and inspection involving livestock vessels departing from South America, particularly in Spanish enforcement contexts. While the documentation presently available does not justify treating all such voyages as criminally contaminated, it does support the conclusion that this is not a purely isolated phenomenon and warrants heightened risk-based scrutiny.

This recurring frequency, even if based on partial intelligence, suggests a level of operational regularity that is inconsistent with isolated or opportunistic use.



**Livestock export vessel Spiron II.** Credit: Frank Behrends (2012)

Read more on the [Spiron II Tragedy \(2025\)](#) in [WAJ blog](#), (joint open letter to WOA)



## 4. IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIME PREVENTION AND POLICY

### 4.1. LIVESTOCK VESSELS AS EMERGING HIGH-RISK PLATFORMS

Livestock vessels should be formally recognized as high-risk platforms within maritime trafficking risk assessments.

Their operational opacity, the practical limitations affecting inspection, and their integration into established global trade routes make them especially vulnerable to criminal use.

## CONCLUSION OF PART II

Live export (LE) of animals represents a rapidly expanding global trade marked by significant structural vulnerabilities. Emerging evidence indicates that this legal industry is increasingly intersecting with transnational organized crime, particularly drug trafficking. Livestock vessels provide conditions that facilitate concealment, complicate inspections, and enable sophisticated trafficking operations.

Although documentation remains limited, confirmed cases and repeated suspicions demonstrate that this convergence is real and evolving. Recognizing this dynamic is essential for effective crime prevention. As with wildlife trafficking, the issue is not confined to the commodity being transported, but extends to the systems, infrastructures, and networks that enable illicit activity. Addressing live animal export within the broader framework of organized crime is therefore necessary both to strengthen enforcement and to safeguard the integrity of global trade systems.





# ANNEX I – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ANIMALS RECOGNITION IN CRIME CONVERGENCE

## 1. IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL CRIME PREVENTION

The integration of animal exploitation into crime convergence analysis has several direct implications for global crime prevention.

**1**

First, crime prevention strategies must move beyond sectoral silos. Wildlife trafficking, maritime transport, narcotics trafficking, corruption, and financial crime should no longer be treated as entirely separate domains where evidence points to overlap.

**2**

Second, early detection requires attention to interconnected systems rather than isolated commodities. Wildlife trafficking and suspicious animal-transport operations may serve as indicators of broader criminal infrastructures.

**3**

Third, legal and illegal sectors must be analyzed together. The distinction between lawful and unlawful economic activity cannot be assumed to coincide with the distinction between low-risk and high-risk sectors.

**4**

Fourth, financial and logistical infrastructures must be prioritized. Routes, ports, shipping systems, shell companies, wildlife farms, tourism fronts, fisheries, and related business structures may all serve as enabling mechanisms for organized crime.

Ignoring animal exploitation weakens the overall effectiveness of organized crime prevention strategies.



## 2. DIRECT HARM AND STRUCTURAL REALITY

Animals within these systems are not incidental. They are directly affected by the practices involved.

In wildlife trafficking, animals are captured, transported, commodified, injured, and killed within criminal systems. In live animal export, animals are subjected to prolonged suffering regardless of whether additional illicit activity is taking place. Where such trade also facilitates drug trafficking or other criminal conduct, the animal harm is not secondary to the system—it is embedded within it.

Recognizing animals as harmed entities within criminal systems does not depend on existing legal classifications of victimhood. It depends on factual analysis of harm, exploitation, and functional use within criminal operations. This recognition is important not only ethically, but analytically: it improves understanding of how these systems operate and what they require in order to function.



**Live-export cattle in Zofar quarantine, Israel, before transfer to feedlots and slaughterhouses (2016).**

Photo credit: Anat Refuah, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International.



# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 15TH UN CRIME CONGRESS

## **RECOMMENDATION 1 – RECOGNIZE ANIMAL EXPLOITATION AS A CRIME CONVERGENCE ISSUE WITHIN ORGANIZED CRIME FRAMEWORKS**

The Congress should explicitly acknowledge that animal exploitation—both illegal and legal—can intersect with transnational organized crime systems. Wildlife trafficking should be addressed not solely as an environmental offense, but as a potential component of diversified criminal portfolios. Lawful sectors such as live animal export should also be examined where they create concealment opportunities, logistical support, or operational advantages for organized crime.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2 – ACKNOWLEDGE ANIMALS AS HARMED ENTITIES WITHIN CRIMINAL SYSTEMS**

Congress outcomes should recognize that animals are directly affected within these converging systems. This does not require immediate reformulation of all legal victim categories, but it does require explicit acknowledgment that animals are not merely incidental objects of trade. They are harmed entities within systems that may also facilitate narcotics trafficking, violence, corruption, and other serious crimes.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3 – STRENGTHEN CROSS-SECTORAL ENFORCEMENT COORDINATION**

Member States and relevant international bodies should strengthen cooperation between wildlife authorities, maritime regulators, customs administrations, anti-narcotics units, anti-corruption bodies, prosecutors, and financial intelligence units. Crime convergence cannot be addressed through siloed enforcement. Joint risk analysis, shared intelligence, and coordinated investigations should become standard practice where animal exploitation intersects with organized crime.



#### **RECOMMENDATION 4 – PRIORITIZE FINANCIAL INVESTIGATIONS AND ASSET DISRUPTION**

Financial flows linked to animal exploitation should be systematically traced, investigated, and disrupted. This includes the use of legitimate sectors—such as wildlife farms, timber, fisheries, tourism businesses, shipping operations, and related commercial entities—to absorb or launder illicit proceeds. Following the money is essential to identifying the full architecture of converging criminal systems.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5 – ADDRESS MARITIME VULNERABILITIES IN LIVE ANIMAL EXPORT**

States and relevant international actors should strengthen oversight of livestock vessels, including controls related to flags of convenience, vessel age and condition, high-risk routes, and port inspection practices. Maritime animal transport should not be treated solely as a trade or welfare issue where evidence indicates its potential use as an illicit trafficking platform.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6 – SHIFT FROM COMMODITY-BASED ENFORCEMENT TO SYSTEMS-BASED PREVENTION**

The most effective response is not limited to regulating individual commodities. It requires identifying and disrupting the infrastructures, networks, facilitators, and enabling conditions that allow criminal systems to function across sectors. Congress discussions and outcomes should therefore encourage systems-based approaches grounded in route analysis, corruption mapping, financial tracing, and infrastructure disruption.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7 – INTEGRATE ANIMAL EXPLOITATION INTO -ORIENTED ANALYSIS AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Without necessarily requiring immediate amendment to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Congress delegates should encourage fuller use of UNTOC-based frameworks, interpretive guidance, and implementation practice to address wildlife trafficking and other forms of animal exploitation where they intersect with serious transnational crime. This would help bridge the gap between sector-specific regulation and organized crime enforcement.



# CONCLUSION

**The evidence demonstrates that animal exploitation—both illegal and legal—is embedded, in important and recurring ways, within broader systems of transnational organized crime.**

**Wildlife trafficking and live animal export illustrate complementary dimensions of this reality. The former reflects the integration of illicit animal trade into diversified criminal systems. The latter demonstrates how lawful activities can generate operational conditions that facilitate illicit trafficking. Despite their different legal status, both rely on shared infrastructures, routes, vulnerabilities, and enabling mechanisms that connect them to wider illicit economies.**

**Animal exploitation can therefore no longer be treated as analytically or institutionally marginal to transnational organized crime. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for effective crime prevention and for strengthening the coherence of criminal justice responses.**

**The central issue is not only what is trafficked, but how criminal systems operate across sectors. Addressing this requires a shift from regulating commodities to identifying and dismantling the networks, infrastructures, financial mechanisms, and governance failures that sustain them. It is at this systemic level that meaningful and lasting disruption of transnational organized crime can be achieved.**

**The 15th United Nations Crime Congress provides a timely and strategic opportunity to explicitly integrate animal exploitation into organized crime frameworks, to strengthen its recognition within contemporary crime convergence dynamics, and to align international crime prevention strategies more closely with the operational realities of transnational organized criminal systems.**



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**It is our hope that this advocacy report will contribute to advancing the recognition of animals as victims of organized crime and other serious forms of exploitation, and support stronger legal and policy action within international fora to prevent, investigate, and combat these crimes.**

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