



PRESS RELEASE

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USAID SUPPORTS CAMPAIGN AT BANGKOK'S AIRPORT TO THWART WILDLIFE TRAFFICKERS

USAID is supporting the training of 250 airport security and law enforcement officials to prevent wildlife trafficking at Bangkok's international airport, a key transshipment point for endangered species.

The "Wildlife Trafficking Stops Here" campaign, which is teaching officials to identify and intercept smuggled wildlife, is the first large-scale education program of its kind ever held at a major Asian airport. Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport serves more than 30 million passengers a year.

The campaign is part of a multi-faceted effort aimed at thwarting wildlife traffickers in the region. In addition to the training sessions, photos of endangered animals are being projected on TV monitors above check-in counters, and anti-trafficking placards are being posted throughout the airport.

USAID is supporting the campaign through its funding of the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), the largest regional environmental law enforcement network in the world. ASEAN-WEN is organizing and providing technical assistance for the training.

U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Eric John joined Thailand's Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Suwit Khunkitti and the Director and Chairman of FREELAND Foundation, Dr. Kraisak Choonhavan, at the launch of the campaign, a joint effort between the Airports of Thailand PLC (AOT) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

"The U.S. Government supports Airports of Thailand's bold commitment to halt illegal wildlife trade through its partnership with Thailand's National ASEAN-WEN Task Force," Ambassador John said at the campaign's launch. "We believe Suvarnabhumi International Airport's 'Wildlife Trafficking Stops Here' campaign is a model and will have a significant regional and global impact."

Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation is also part of the "Wildlife Trafficking Stops Here" campaign through its association with ASEAN-WEN.

Ambassador John praised AOT's and the Thai Government's "true leadership" and said the program would be "make Suvarnabhumi an international environmental model for other airports to emulate."

Thailand, with its rich biodiversity, is a supplier rather than a consumer of illegal wildlife. Other sources of animals in the region include Indonesia, Burma, Cambodia and Laos. Smugglers often ship goods through Thailand because of its excellent connections to Europe, North America and other parts of Asia.



Last June, two smugglers were arrested at Suvarnabhumi airport as they attempted to ship more than 1,000 snakes and turtles through the cargo terminal. In January 2008, more than 1.4 tons of live snakes, some of them poisonous, were discovered on a Vietnam Airlines flight after it arrived in Hanoi from Bangkok. Last month, an Australian bound for Bangkok was arrested at Sydney International Airport with 44 reptiles, including a rare albino carpet python, in his bags.

During the second half of 2008, more than 100 wildlife traffickers were arrested in Southeast Asia, more than 25,000 live animals were rescued, and more than 4.5 tons of smuggled animal carcasses were seized by authorities.

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Additional information:

1. ASEAN-WEN is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network. It involves environmental, law enforcement and customs agencies in all 10 ASEAN countries and facilitates cross-border collaboration in the fight against illegal wildlife trade in the region. Launched in Bangkok on December 1, 2005, it now is the world's largest regional wildlife enforcement network.
2. Thai-WEN is the National Task Force Wildlife Enforcement Network in Thailand. It includes the Royal Thai Police (Natural Resources and Environmental Crimes Division), Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (Wildlife Fauna and Flora Conservation Division) and Royal Thai Customs.
3. Two international non-governmental organizations, FREELAND Foundation (formerly PeunPa) and TRAFFIC, via a cooperative partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), provide technical assistance to government agencies implementing ASEAN-WEN.
4. The ASEAN-WEN Program Coordination Unit has released a detailed update and statistical summary of major interdictions against illegal wildlife trade by Southeast Asian law enforcement authorities from July 2008 to December 2008. It is available from the ASEAN-WEN website (www.asean-wen.org).

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