



**U.S. Embassy Dar es
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**U.S.-SPONSORED “TEAM OF CHAMPIONS” TRAINING TO SUPPORT
TANZANIA’S ANTI-POACHING EFFORTS AT HOME AND ABROAD**

Marking the latest step forward in global anti-poaching efforts, the United States Government is supporting a Team of Champions training program for members of Tanzania’s National and Transnational Serious Crimes Investigative Unit—often referred to simply as the “Task Force.” The Team of Champions program, held in the United States for three weeks from September 4–23, aims to improve the Task Force’s ability to respond to poaching and trafficking in Tanzania, and connect them with broader international efforts targeting organized crime networks.

“Training like this with our American colleagues will further strengthen our abilities to combat wildlife trafficking and poaching, whether in investigating the financing of poaching syndicates or tracking ivory smuggling routes,” commented a program participant.

Formed in 1998 as a means of combatting terrorism, the Task Force was first charged with responding to wildlife trafficking in 2014. Since that time, this elite interagency unit has been a staple of recent headlines, including the 2015 arrest of notorious trafficker Yang Feng Glan, aka “The Ivory Queen,” and the seizure of 1.2 tons of ivory in Dar es Salaam in July 2016. From November 2014 – July 2016, the Task Force led operations and investigations resulting in the arrest of 1,702 suspected traffickers and poachers, in addition to 290 convictions. Of the higher-level criminals, 30 received sentences of 16-20 years.

In spite of such milestones, wildlife trafficking continues to pose a major threat to East Africa’s biodiversity, keystone species, and the tourism industry, which accounts for 1.5 million jobs in Tanzania alone. While arrests of suspected poachers are on the rise, Tanzania experienced a staggering 60 percent decline in elephant populations from 2009 – 2014.

Next week, the international spotlight on wildlife poaching will intensify, as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) commences its Conference of the Parties (COP) in Johannesburg, South Africa September 24 – October 5.

Referencing the Team of Champions program, U.S. Ambassador to Tanzania Mark Childress commented: “The United States and Tanzania have been working hand-in-hand across numerous agencies, as well as with the international community, to combat the poaching crisis in Tanzania. This specialized program will provide yet another means of effectively reducing wildlife

poaching and trafficking, while fostering continued cooperation on this critical issue.”

During their three weeks in the United States, members of the Task Force met with the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as different U.S. Government law enforcement agencies to receive practical training in investigative practices, case prosecution, and wildlife forensics. Trainees also visited Shenandoah National Park, where they learned steps the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service takes to prevent and respond to illegal practices such as bear poaching.

The Team of Champions program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)’s Promoting Tanzania’s Environment, Conservation, and Tourism Project (PROTECT) in collaboration with the Terrorism, Transnational Crime, and Corruption Center (TraCCC) at George Mason University. In the wake of the ongoing poaching crisis in Tanzania, the U.S. Government continues to assist efforts to fight wildlife trafficking and safeguard natural resources in support of Tanzania’s national development goals.

To request more information about this event, please email Japhet Sanga (SangaJJ@state.gov), Senior Information Specialist at U.S. Embassy Dar es Salaam.