



CONTACT:

In U.S.: Stephen Sautner (718-220-3682; ssautner@wcs.org); John Delaney (718-220-3275; jdelaney@wcs.org)

In Indonesia: Dr. Robert J. Lee (62-251-321527; rlee@wcs.org); Harry Alexander (62-251-321527; halexander@wcsip.org)

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

IN INDONESIA, A UNIQUE PROGRAM BY CONSERVATIONISTS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES LEAD TO HIGHEST SENTENCES FOR HUNTING AND TRADE OF ENDANGERED SPECIES

LAMPUNG, SOUTHERN SUMATRA, INDONESIA (NEEDS DATE, 2003) – A six-month old program involving Indonesian government agencies working with the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and local partners has resulted in the two most severe sentences yet seen in Indonesia for violating wildlife laws. The recently sentenced hunters were given three years and six months each in prison and fined.

Called the Wildlife Crimes Unit (WCU), the new program has also resulted in four other recent arrests with jail sentences of up to one year and four months. Although these sentences were less than requested by the State General Prosecutor, Suwono, they have set a national legal precedence for wild life violations. “We are serious about enforcing environmental laws, particularly of species that represent our natural heritage, and we will make sure that violators do not escape justice,” stated Gatot Susanto, the judge who decided on these cases.

The new program monitors local wildlife trade, apprehends violators, and facilitates due process to ensure that the law enforcement is carried out from start to finish. It was originally established in 2002, on the eastern Indonesian island of Sulawesi to combat illegal hunting, the primary threat to Sulawesi wildlife populations. “The animals that we followed and observed often ended up in markets and cooking pots,” said Dr. Rob Lee, Director of the WCS Indonesia Program. Since the establishment of WCU program in North Sulawesi, road traffic of protected species has been reduced by 87 percent.

In January 2003, a WCU was established in Lampung, a province where populations of tigers, elephants, and primates are under high hunting pressure. The unit is comprised of members from the Department of Forestry Species Protection and Nature Conservation (BKSDA), police, ALAS and WATALA (two local groups based in Lampung), Alliance of Indonesian Journalists, and WCS.

The key to the success of this program has been the dangerous work carried out by brave patrol units, particularly the Rhino Protection Units (RPU) who have been carrying out undercover investigations and field patrols. “It has taken years to get inside the network, but we are now making

headways into finding out who's doing what, and going after them," said Arief, the field manager of the Rhino Protection Units in Sumatra. Once arrests are made, WCUs assist in gathering evidence, preparing legal briefs, and providing technical assistance to prosecutors and judges to ensure that protection laws are enforced. Local conservation groups and journalists, as members of the unit, also take on a watchdog role through the legal process. WCU coordinators and staff have also been working with police, prosecutors, and judges to provide material on current protection laws and precedents, and training in identifying parts of wildlife species in markets and other places of trade.

Hunting and trade in endangered and protected wildlife species has always been rampant throughout Indonesia, but hunting at unsustainable rates has been leading to dramatic population losses in recent years. Although there are national laws to protect wildlife and monitor protected forests, lack of good field information and weak legal systems have allowed illegal hunting and wildlife trade to go unchecked. Sales of parts of endangered and protected wildlife such as tigers, rhinos, elephants and live animals such as birds and primates in large cities are common, and poachers and traders who are caught are mostly released without due process of law. "Time and time again, our guards go after hunters and help in arresting violators, but the process always seem to fall apart after this. The fact that the prosecutors and judges working on these cases have stepped up their efforts to enforce environmental laws makes me think that there is hope for our wildlife," said Widodo, the Director of Species Conservation at the Department of Forestry.

"Until this time, Indonesia hasn't had a lot of success in enforcing conservation laws because we haven't put in the time and thinking to combat wildlife trade. There are several laws that can be used to go after illegal hunters and traders, but a lot of legal experts and officers have not paid attention to the nature of the crime or these laws. Through these efforts, I think we showed that justice and the legal system can work if we put our minds to it," commented Harry Alexander, coordinator for WCU program.

Thus far, the WCU program has achieved rapid and strong results. "We feel that this program has great potential to curb the illegal trade in key wildlife species in Indonesia, and hope to see others follow suit," said Sarah Christie of 21st Century Tiger, a tiger fundraising partnership between the Zoological Society of London (ZLS) and Global Tiger Patrol, who is supporting the WCU program. WCS plans to work with the Department of Forestry and other government agencies and local groups to establish WCUs in wildlife trade hotspots, particularly at international ports, across the Indonesian archipelago.

"It's not enough that we curb wildlife trade in southern Sumatra or in North Sulawesi. There must be a concerted effort at the national level to reduce not only hunting and wildlife trade at the national level, but trade that occurs between Indonesia and other countries," added Koes Saparjadi, the Director General of the Department of Forestry.

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