



Statement in response to the Global Initiative's report entitled, *Empty Forests*

May 17, 2023

The IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group's Section on Great Apes (SGA) is a group of experts active in conservation and research who volunteer their time to advise on effective measures to conserve great apes. Many of the group's members are actively carrying out conservation and research efforts that address threats to great ape populations and most importantly the primary drivers of such threats. International trafficking or social media sales is a major concern and a symptom of the biggest threats to great apes: habitat loss and poaching — predominantly for local consumption and national trade — driven by habitat conversion, poor governance, poverty and lack of sustainable livelihood options, which kill thousands of great apes every year.

Recently, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime published a report written by Dan Stiles entitled, *Empty Forests*. Mr. Stiles did not consult with the Primate Specialist Group nor its Section on Great Apes regarding the publication. Absent from his analysis is a reporting of the many ways the SGA and its members are contributing to great ape conservation globally, including the illegal trafficking of apes.

The SGA considers all threats to great ape populations as serious and many of its volunteers have dedicated their professional careers to reducing or reversing the threats to great apes. Through [the IUCN Red List](#), [conservation action planning processes](#), the [ARRC Task Force](#), the [A.P.E.S. database](#), [best practice guidelines](#), working groups, and multiple other avenues, SGA members are actively working to improve the survival of great apes worldwide. Several of these are listed in more detail below.

The IUCN Red List assessments of great apes, together with scientific papers authored by SGA and GRASP members, list killing, capture and illegal trade as major threats. Additionally, the [2018 GRASP & IUCN report](#) to CITES on the status of great apes and their habitats details the (<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/70/E-SC70-52.pdf>) threat of illegal trafficking for all great apes. SGA Members also contributed significantly to the 2020 Arcus State of the Apes publication, [Killing, Capture, Trade, and Conservation](#).

SGA Priorities for action are defined largely through [great ape action plans](#) using a consensus expert-based workshop process for each taxon. The *IUCN regional action plan for the conservation of western chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes verus*) 2020-2030*, for example, identifies

specific measures needed to address great ape poaching, including illegal trade. In general, the implementation of these plans, including activities related to trafficking are supported by individual members and conservation NGOs.

The SGA's [ARRC Task Force](#) (Avoid, Reduce, Restore, Conserve) addresses the growing impacts to apes from energy, infrastructure, and extractive industry projects. Often these projects open up new roads that bring in international and local workers, new settlements, and along with them the commercial bushmeat trade and disease, providing fertile ground for the illegal wildlife trade. Addressing these projects, the lending banks that support them, and the companies which buy minerals such as bauxite and iron ore, has become a critical priority in reducing threats to great apes globally. In 2018, the SGA was successful in moving the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) to change their lending guidance and require all potential clients seeking loans in areas that overlap with great ape habitat to consult with the SGA. This process was formalized through the creation of the ARRC Task Force, which raises awareness, strengthens capacity and directly advises lending banks, such as the IFC, to ensure their clients not only avoid ape habitat where possible, but also minimize their impacts on great apes. Through the activities of the ARRC Task Force, the SGA and its members are having a direct impact in reducing the myriad of threats to great apes, which includes ape trafficking.

For more information, please contact Dirck Byler, Vice-Chair and Coordinator of the SGA (dbyler@rewild.org / +1-240-278-5550) and/or Genevieve Campbell, Lead of the SGA's ARRC Task Force (gcampbell@rewild.org).

Sincerely,

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