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Press Release

CONTACT: Nguyen Thi Van Anh, Tel. (04) 3514-8850 (vananh.env@gmail.com)

“Year of the Tiger” – A time to take action for tigers

Hanoi, March 15th, 2010 – Education for Nature – Vietnam (ENV) urged the Vietnamese public to take action to protect the world’s remaining tigers at a press conference today in Hanoi, releasing the preliminary findings of a twelve-month investigation of the tiger trade in Vietnam by ENV.

“Our findings suggest a growth of consumer demand for tiger bone traditional medicine (TM) here in Vietnam, particularly amongst the wealthy,” says Nguyen Thi Van Anh, ENV’s Wildlife Trade Program Coordinator. “Our demand for tiger bone medicine is contributing to the loss of tigers, not just here in our own country, but also across the species’ native range.”

Van Anh said the investigation revealed links between some tiger farms in Vietnam and illegal trade and provided significant insight into the mechanics of the trade, including the smuggling of tigers across borders and potential criminal networks operating in Vietnam that may be responsible for much of the tiger trade.

According to a recent report by WWF, scientists estimate that there are only about 30 tigers left in the wild in Vietnam. Poaching, shrinking habitat, and reduction of prey base are the major reasons leading to the decline.



Since 2005, there have been 16 documented seizures of tigers in trade involving 29 animals. ENV believes that this is only a small fraction of the number of tigers that are illegally sourced either from farms in Vietnam or smuggled into Vietnam each year to produce “tiger bone glue”, a form of traditional medicine believed to strengthen bones, increase vitality, and treat a range of other ailments.

The investigation, carried out in cooperation with investigators from several government agencies, profiled six known private businesses keeping live tigers and two state zoos. Interviews were conducted with a range of people knowledgeable about the trade, including suspects involved in smuggling cases, tiger bone glue makers, traditional medicine shop owners, and informants.

Some of our key findings in the tiger trade investigation include:

- Since 2006, ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit has documented 104 crimes involving tigers. Sixteen of these cases involved seizures of tigers including frozen or unfrozen remains, or tiger bones. One incident involved live tigers.
- The tiger trade in Vietnam is specifically focused on supplying tigers for tiger bone TM production. Tiger TM products are intended for Vietnamese consumers, not exported.
- Consumers obtain tiger bone glue through personal contacts with brokers, witnessing the event to assure authenticity of the product, and less often purchasing products over the counter.
- Three of six of registered tiger farms are suspected of being involved in illegal tiger trade activities.
- Of 29 tigers seized in trade, most appear to have originated abroad from places such as tiger farms in Laos.

“While we celebrate the many successes of the Environmental Police in investigating and seizing tigers in trade, we recognize the need for the government to strengthen monitoring of tiger farms in Vietnam and strongly recommend that farms that are engaged in illegal activities be immediately closed,” says Van Anh.

Van Anh went on to highlight the need for Vietnam to develop more effective cooperation between law enforcement counterparts across borders. “The tiger trade is a regional, not just a national crisis, involving many countries,” says Van Anh. “Our law enforcement agencies need to work with counterparts in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and other countries with clear links in the trade to identify and prosecute the kingpins that control and finance the illegal trade.”

ENV plans to produce a confidential report to key law enforcement agencies and decision-makers in early May that will provide a more detailed review of the investigation’s findings.

ENV wishes to thank The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation and the US Fish and Wildlife Service for supporting our efforts to end tiger consumption and trade in Vietnam. We would also like to thank the Melia Hotel of Hanoi for providing the venue for ENV to meet journalists and announce the findings of our investigation.

About Education for Nature - Vietnam

Education for Nature-Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam’s first non-governmental organization focused on conservation of nature and the environment. Our mission is to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about environmental issues of local, national and global significance, ranging from protection of wildlife and natural ecosystems to climate change. We employ creative and innovative strategies to influence attitudes and behavior, not only highlighting the need to protect Vietnam’s rich natural heritage and the living world around us, but also encouraging greater public participation in achieving this important and challenging task.

Education for Nature - Vietnam

No. 5 Ngo 192 Thai Thinh
 PO Box 222
 Dong Da district
 Hanoi, Vietnam

Phone/fax: +84 4 514-8850

E-mail: env@fpt.vn

www.envietnam.org (English)

www.thiennhien.org (Vietnamese)

www.savingvietnamswildlife.org (English wildlife trade website)