



First General Assembly

South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network

10- 11 September 2026

Kathmandu, Nepal

MEDIA SUMMARY Released on 11 September 2026

Kathmandu, Nepal

South Asian Countries Adopt Kathmandu Declaration and Regional Action Framework at Historic First SAWEN General Assembly

Kathmandu, 11 September 2026: South Asian countries reaffirmed their collective commitment to combating illegal wildlife trade and strengthening regional cooperation at the First General Assembly of the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN), held in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 10–11 September 2026.

The Assembly was chaired by Honourable Gita Chaudhary, Minister for Agriculture, Forests and Environment of Nepal, and was inaugurated by Right Honourable Dol Prasad Aryal, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Nepal. Honourable Abdul Awal Mintoo, Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Bangladesh, addressed the inaugural session. The Assembly programme was also addressed by Honourable Shisir Khanal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, who highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and collective responsibility in addressing transboundary challenges.

A major outcome was the adoption of the Kathmandu Declaration on Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade in South Asia. The Declaration reaffirms the political commitment of Member Countries to prevent, detect and combat illegal wildlife trade and strengthen responses to serious wildlife crime. It calls for stronger information and intelligence sharing, coordinated enforcement and criminal-justice cooperation, financial investigations, technology and research, as well as greater attention to the capacity, safety and well-being of rangers and other frontline personnel. It also promotes public awareness, demand reduction and stronger regional and international partnerships.

The Assembly also agreed to observe 30 January every year as “SAWEN Day”, commemorating the formal launch of SAWEN in Bhutan in 2011.

Key Decisions of the General Assembly

The General Assembly adopted the SAWEN Implementation Plan 2026–2030 and endorsed the Three-Year Programme of Work and Budget for 2026/27–2028/29. Priorities include regional enforcement and intelligence cooperation, criminal-justice responses, capacity development, marine and freshwater wildlife crime, international cooperation, research and knowledge management, demand reduction, and institutional strengthening.

The Assembly adopted an annual contribution for Member Countries with effect from 1 January 2027, while affirming Member Country ownership and host-country support as the institutional foundation of SAWEN, complemented by external financial, technical and in-kind assistance.

A package of resolutions and decisions was also adopted covering regional intelligence and enforcement cooperation, cyber and digital investigations, wildlife forensics, financial investigation, criminal justice, capacity development, marine and freshwater wildlife crime, international cooperation, public awareness and regional research. The Assembly further adopted its Rules of Procedure and considered a framework for the future engagement and admission of Other Members.

Executive Committee and Technical Workshop

The 15th Meeting of the SAWEN Executive Committee, held on 9 September, prepared the ground for the Assembly by reviewing the governance, programme, financial and policy documents and providing strategic direction on the Implementation Plan, Programme of Work, proposed resolutions and Kathmandu Declaration.

The Assembly was also preceded on 10 September by the South Asia Illegal Wildlife Trade Landscape Workshop. Member Countries presented their national wildlife-crime landscapes, emerging trends, enforcement experiences and priorities for cross-border cooperation. The workshop featured three keynote presentations by regional and international experts, including representatives of TRAFFIC and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), alongside SAWEN's regional evidence on wildlife crime. Discussions emphasized stronger information sharing, enforcement cooperation, financial and cyber investigations, research and capacity development.

Local, Regional and International Cooperation

Representatives of UN agencies such as UNODC, the CITES Secretariat/ICCWC, and IGAs such as the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA), ICIMOD, GSLEP and other partners participated in the programme and emphasized the importance of continued regional and international cooperation.

The inaugural ceremony also featured the release of the Zero Poaching Toolkit 2026, the photo book “A Journey of SAWEN”, and the institutional film “Evolution of SAWEN.” Delegates also expressed sympathy and solidarity with the Government and people of Nepal following the recent floods.

From Decisions to Action

The First General Assembly marks SAWEN's transition towards a more structured phase of implementation, accountability and regional cooperation. The Secretariat will work with Member Countries, the Executive Committee, national focal points and partners to translate the Kathmandu Declaration, resolutions and Implementation Plan into practical regional action.

“The decisions have been made and the direction has been given. Our responsibility now is to turn them into action,” said Dr Krishna Prasad Acharya, Secretary General of SAWEN.

SAWEN comprises Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, with its Secretariat based in Kathmandu, Nepal. The First General Assembly represents a significant milestone in

strengthening South Asia's collective response to illegal wildlife trade through sustained cooperation, shared knowledge and coordinated action.