



First General Assembly
South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network

10 to 11 September 2026

Kathmandu, Nepal

Kathmandu Declaration

Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade in South Asia

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation of the Member Countries of the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network, meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal, at the First General Assembly of SAWEN,

Reaffirming the objectives and principles of the SAWEN Statute and our shared commitment to strengthen regional cooperation in preventing, detecting and combating illegal wildlife trade;

Reaffirming also our commitments under relevant international conventions and frameworks, including CITES, UNTOC the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sustainable Development Goals, and recalling relevant international decisions and processes concerning illegal wildlife trade and biodiversity conservation;

Recognizing that South Asia is home to globally significant biodiversity and shared ecosystems that sustain ecological integrity, economic prosperity and the well-being of present and future generations;

Deeply concerned that illegal wildlife trade has evolved into an increasingly sophisticated form of transnational organized crime, converging with corruption, illicit financial flows and other serious crimes, exploiting digital technologies and porous borders, and increasingly involving illegal trade in live wild animals alongside wildlife parts and derivatives;

Recognizing further that illegal wildlife trade presents evolving challenges to biodiversity conservation, ecosystem integrity, public health, the rule of law, security and sustainable development, requiring stronger institutions, scientific innovation and enhanced regional cooperation;

Acknowledging that effectively addressing illegal wildlife trade requires sustained political commitment, effective institutions, predictable financing, strengthened regional cooperation and meaningful partnerships at national, regional and international levels;

Recognizing the First General Assembly as a historic milestone in the institutional development of SAWEN as South Asia's regional intergovernmental mechanism for combating illegal wildlife trade;

We hereby declare our collective commitment to advance our efforts in accordance with our national circumstances, priorities and capabilities:

1. We affirm our strong political commitment to prevent, detect and combat illegal wildlife trade and associated forms of transnational organized crime in South Asia, recognizing their threats to our region's natural heritage, biodiversity, the rule of law, security and sustainable development.
2. We resolve to address serious wildlife crime, particularly when transnational in nature and involving organized criminal groups, through coordinated criminal justice responses, including intelligence-led and financial investigations, anti-money laundering measures, asset recovery and effective prosecution, with a view to disrupting organized criminal networks operating within and across the countries of the region. We further

encourage Member Countries to actively support and engage in relevant regional and global initiatives aimed at strengthening the recognition and treatment of serious wildlife crime as a form of transnational organized crime, and at strengthening the international legal and institutional response to wildlife trafficking.

3. We commit to strengthening information and intelligence sharing, coordinated enforcement action and criminal justice collaboration among Member Countries, consistent with national laws and applicable international obligations.
4. We recognize the importance of predictable financial support, including Member Country contributions, and reaffirm that strong Member Country ownership is fundamental to the effective and sustainable functioning of SAWEN.
5. We commit to promoting science, technology, innovation, research and regional knowledge sharing to strengthen responses to wildlife crime, combat biopiracy, illegal access to biological resources and emerging threats.
6. We commit to strengthening the capacities, safety and well-being of rangers, forest officers and wildlife officers, customs officers, police, prosecutors and other frontline personnel engaged in combating illegal wildlife trade and protecting wildlife across the region
7. We commit to strengthening communication, education, public awareness, behavioural change and demand reduction through meaningful engagement with communities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, civil society, academia, youth, women, media and relevant private sectors, including transport, logistics, financial services, e-commerce and tourism.
8. We commit to strengthening bilateral, sub-regional and regional cooperation through SAWEN to address transboundary wildlife crime and advance shared regional priorities.
9. We commit to strengthening cooperation with relevant international and regional conventions, mechanisms, organizations and development partners, recognizing the shared responsibilities of source, transit and destination countries.
10. We reaffirm our commitment to strengthening SAWEN as an effective, accountable and well-governed regional intergovernmental mechanism for combating illegal wildlife trade.
11. We commit to reviewing progress in the implementation of this Declaration through the Executive Committee and at future sessions of the General Assembly.
12. We agree to observe 30 January each year as “SAWEN Day”, commemorating the formal launch of SAWEN on 30 January 2011 in Paro, Bhutan, and to use the occasion to promote public awareness, regional cooperation and collective action to combat wildlife crime across South Asia.

We call upon relevant international and regional organizations, development partners, financial institutions, academia, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders to strengthen collaboration with SAWEN and its Member Countries in support of regional efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade.

United by our shared natural heritage and common responsibility, we reaffirm our determination to strengthen regional solidarity, safeguard South Asia's biodiversity, uphold the rule of law and ensure that illegal wildlife trade finds no safe haven in our region. We commit to translating this Declaration into concrete action through the SAWEN Implementation Plan 2026 to 2030 and the decisions adopted by the First General Assembly.

Adopted by consensus at Kathmandu, Nepal, on the Eleventh Day of September Two Thousand and Twenty-Six.