



PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**GRACE FARMS FOUNDATION
IN COLLABORATION WITH INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE
DISMANTLES WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING SYNDICATE**

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Eight African nationals, including government officers, have been arrested for trafficking large consignments of endangered wildlife during a major law enforcement operation. The arrests were a result of a successful multinational law enforcement operation that spanned seven countries over four weeks and traced wild animal body parts seized in Southeast Asia to sophisticated smuggling operations in two Central African countries. The enforcement sweep resulted in four arrests in the Democratic Republic of Congo and four arrests in Congo Brazzaville. The operation was supported by INTERPOL.

Djani Ousmane, a Guinean national “Kingpin” tied to multiple wildlife trafficking shipments, is one of the eight arrested, along with three government officers responsible for inspecting commercial exports.

The string of arrests followed a Counter Trans-National Organized Crime Training (C-TOC) session run by law enforcement advisors from **Grace Farms Foundation, Freeland, The Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF)**, and government agencies, who trained the investigators in using advanced case building and analytics techniques. Through the training, held in Congo Brazzaville in February, officers from Southeast Asia and Central Africa learned about joint investigations, evidence and data gathering, how to link illicit trafficking channels between Africa and Asia, and shared intelligence on wildlife seizures. During the intelligence sharing session, the investigators discovered a criminal syndicate operating between Central Africa and Asia.

The accused are tied to the seizure of 3.8 tons of pangolin body scales (roughly 1,000 dead animals) in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The black-market street value of the pangolin body scales, often used in illegal medicines, was an estimated \$2.6 million. They are also implicated in the September 2017 seizure of elephant tusks from Thailand. An estimated 40-50 elephants are poached per day for their tusks, with some illicit ivory products valued at several hundred thousands of dollars each.

“Our ability to make so many key arrests in such a short period of time was due to advanced training and technology,” said Bonaventure Ebayi, Executive Director of LATF. “The officers also brushed up on law to help them make thorough and convincing cases to the court, which paid off.”

Grace Farms Foundation provided self-funded organized crime investigators and specialists to the Counter Trans-National Organized Crime Task Force. “The arrest and prosecution of Wildlife Trafficking Syndicate members was the result of hard work and a multi-national investigative collaboration among law enforcement officers who attended the training. The selected law enforcement officers were equipped with all the tools needed to effectively investigate and prosecute these criminal networks,” said Rod Khattabi, Director & Justice Initiative Advisor.

Mark Fowler, wildlife conservation specialist and Director of the Foundation’s Nature Initiative said, “Combatting wildlife trafficking is of utmost importance when we see the most magnificent animals on Earth disappearing, and this case is a great example of wildlife conservation NGOs working with multinational law enforcement in order to effectively take down these criminal cartels.”

“Moving beyond seizures and low-level arrests to high level takedowns like this are what wild elephants, pangolins and other endangered species desperately right now,” said Sean O’Regan, Director of Freeland in Africa, which trained the LATF-led team. “People benefit too: we are finding that these same criminal chains are used to traffic everything.”

Lusaka Agreement Task Force Director Ebayi, said that “investigations will continue until we have dismantled all illicit supply chains that are endangering our continent’s wildlife.”

About Grace Farms Foundation

Grace Farms Foundation supports initiatives in the areas of nature, arts, justice, community, and faith, and encourages participation locally and globally. The Foundation carries out its work through the publicly available facilities and integrated programs of Grace Farms, an 80-acre property owned and operated by the Foundation in Connecticut, USA. Grace Farms was established as an essential platform for the Foundation, serving as a welcoming place where individuals, not-for-profit organizations, and government entities come together to collaborate for the common good.

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Freeland Foundation Freeland is a frontline counter-trafficking organization working for a world that is free of wildlife trafficking and human slavery. Its team of law enforcement, development and communications specialists work alongside partners in Asia, Africa and the Americas to build capacity, raise awareness, and promote good governance to protect critical ecosystems and vulnerable people.

Freeland was formed in 2002 and grew out of Global Survival Network (GSN) and WildAid. GSN addressed global security issues before it became WildAid, which narrowed its focus to endangered species conservation. Freeland now partners with all conservation, security, and human rights organizations to protect vulnerable people and wildlife from organized crime and corruption. The founders of GSN are Steve Galster and Mike Mitchell. Galster was also a co-founder of WildAid, founder of Freeland, and is currently on the Board of Freeland.

freeland.org

Lusanka Agreement Task Force

The Lusanka Agreement Task Force is a permanent law enforcement institution established to facilitate co-operative activities among the National Bureaus of Africa in carrying out investigations pertaining to illegal trade in wild fauna and flora. It comprises seconded law enforcement officers from Party States

(The Republics of Congo (Brazzaville), Kenya, Liberia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and the Kingdom of Lesotho. Republics of South Africa, Ethiopia and the Kingdom of Swaziland) and locally recruited support staff. The Lusaka Agreement Task Force (Task Force) was launched on 1st June 1999, with its headquarters located in Nairobi, Kenya.

lusakaagreement.org