**U.S. and Peru Working to Stymie Environmental Crime**

By VOA

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Environmental crime encompasses activity such as illegal logging, mining, dumping of dangerous chemicals, illegal fishing, and the poaching and illegal sale of wildlife.

This is big business. According to a recent report by the United Nations Environment Program and INTERPOL, only drug smuggling, counterfeiting and trafficking in humans are more profitable criminal endeavors than is environmental crime. Which is why transnational criminal organizations have increasingly become involved in environmental crime. Such is the case in Peru.

“Criminal enterprises thriving off of illegal trade in protected species puts Peru's megadiverse wildlife under pressure. Reptiles, amphibians, and exotic birds are all trafficked illegally for the live pet trade. Poaching of vicuña is on the rise in the Andean region,” said U.S. Ambassador to Peru Brian Nichols at the recent Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, or APEC, Pathfinder III Dialogue.

“Like all forms of transnational organized crime, trafficking in one area strengthens criminal organizations in others, fuels corruption, and imperils our security. Illegal logging, mining, wildlife trafficking, and fishing facilitate the exploitation of individuals for profit, as men, women, and children are subjected to forced labor or sex trafficking.”

This sort of illegal activity engenders and is facilitated by corruption.

On the global level, corruption undermines economic growth, raising the cost of doing business by creating uncertainty, stifling innovation and competitiveness, and deterring investment.

At the local level, corruption and illicit trade strip communities of their resources, leaving behind barren, often poisoned landscapes and aquifers, and derail the regions' sustainable future.

The United States works with Peru to strengthen its capacity to investigate, prosecute, and convict individuals and dismantle criminal networks engaged in environmental crime. At the same time, Peru is using a variety of comprehensive law enforcement approaches to address environmental crime, illicit trade, and human trafficking.

Environmental crime is a global problem, and eliminating it requires a global effort. “Through the Pathfinder Dialogue, APEC economies and partners should continue coordinated investigations across borders to combat environment and human security threats,” said Ambassador Nichols.

“These efforts will build skills that lead to even more effective investigations, seizures, arrests, and prosecutions, as well as effective identification of and assistance to victims of human trafficking.”