

Case Background: Events Leading to Latest Indictment

- This case is a multi-year Federal investigation of illegal trade and trafficking in African elephant ivory.
- This investigation, which was launched by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement in New York in 2006, has documented and disrupted the illegal activities of both international smugglers who were bringing ivory into the country unlawfully from Africa and U.S. retailers involved in a black market trade that passes off new, illegally imported carvings made from raw ivory as antique African tribal art.
- Over the course of the investigation, Service special agents documented smuggled ivory entering the United States from Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda. (Some of these countries are ivory producing, while others are transit points.)
- Initial work on this investigation, which was conducted in partnership with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), resulted in:
 - Arrest and conviction of 8 individuals in the United States on felony smuggling and/or Lacey Act charges
 - Four “collateral” arrests of persons for immigration violations
 - Arrest in January 2010 of an ivory supplier in Uganda by Ugandan authorities
 - Identification of additional suspects involved in trafficking ivory within the United States
- Six of the individuals prosecuted to date were arrested by Service special agents on December 3, 2008.
- Two additional defendants were arrested and charged in January 2008 and November 2009.
- Prosecutions conducted by the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York secured the following sentences:
 - Tamba KABA – 33 months in prison; 3 yrs supervised release; \$25,000 fine
 - Kemo SYLLA – 10 months in prison; 3 yrs supervised release; 180 hrs community service
 - Mamadi DOUMBOUYA – 14 months prison; 3 yrs supervised release; 180 hrs community service
 - Seidou MFOMBOUTMOUN – Time served (approx. 11 months)
 - Bandjan SIDIME – 30 days in prison; 5 months community confinement; 2 yrs supervised release
 - Drissa DIANE – 30 days in prison; 3 months home confinement; 60 hrs community service, \$1,200 fine
 - Mamadou KONE – 1 yr probation; 40 hrs community service; \$1,200 fine
 - Mfopa YACOUBA – 16 months in prison; 3 yrs supervised release

- All defendants except Tamba Kaba negotiated plea agreements with the U.S. Attorney's Office and did not stand trial. Kaba was convicted by a Federal jury in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn in June 2010.
- Most of the ivory smuggled by these defendants was shipped from Africa via parcel through John F. Kennedy International Airport. These shipments were accompanied by fraudulent shipping and customs documents identifying their contents as African wooden handicrafts or wooden statues. The ivory itself was painted to look like wood; covered with clay; or hidden inside wooden handicrafts (such as traditional African musical instruments).
- The Service investigation began with the March 2006 interception of such a shipment at JFK.
- Based on what was learned about this shipment and other intelligence, the Service identified and targeted other incoming shipments likely to contain smuggled ivory. Service wildlife inspectors in New York were deployed to comb through these shipments crate-by-crate when they arrived from Africa.
- After discovery, agents tracked the smuggled ivory on its continued path, which allowed them to identify those responsible for its unlawful importation (including the 8 defendants successfully prosecuted to date) and obtain leads concerning U.S. retailers buying ivory from these and other smugglers.

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