



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Loretta E. Lynch
Eastern District of New York

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PHILADELPHIA SHOP OWNER CHARGED IN AFRICAN ELEPHANT IVORY SMUGGLING INVESTIGATION

Federal Agents Seize Approximately One Ton of Elephant Ivory

BROOKLYN, NY – The owner of a Philadelphia African art store, Victor Gordon, was arrested earlier today on charges of conspiracy, smuggling and Lacey Act violations related to the illegal importation and sale of African elephant ivory. As part of the government's investigation, federal agents seized approximately one ton of elephant ivory – one of the largest U.S. seizures of elephant ivory on record. Gordon is scheduled to have his initial appearance and arraignment today before United States Magistrate Judge Steven M. Gold, at the U.S. Courthouse, 225 Cadman Plaza East, Brooklyn, New York.

The criminal charges were announced by Loretta E. Lynch, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, and Salvatore Amato, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Northeast Region Office of Law Enforcement.

As alleged in the ten-count felony indictment, Gordon paid a co-conspirator to travel to Africa to purchase raw elephant ivory and have it carved to Gordon's specifications. In advance of the trips, Gordon provided the co-conspirator with photographs or other depictions of ivory carvings, which served as templates for the ivory carvers in Africa, and directed the co-conspirator to stain or dye the elephant ivory so that the specimens would appear old. Gordon then planned and financed the illegal importation of the ivory from Africa to the United States through John F. Kennedy International Airport and sold the carvings to customers at his store in Philadelphia.

Illegal trade in African elephant ivory is a major threat to elephant populations in Africa, particularly in the hardest hit poaching regions of West and Central Africa, where the ivory in this investigation originated. African elephants are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ("CITES"), an international treaty that entered into force in 1975 to prevent species from becoming endangered or extinct due to international trade. The African elephant is also listed as a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

The global demand for elephant ivory led to devastating declines in the number of these giant animals, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite international efforts to control the

ivory trade and stop the decline of elephant populations, prices and demand remain high, causing continued elephant poaching and illegal ivory finding its way into international and domestic markets.

“The amount of the elephant ivory allegedly plundered in this case is staggering and highlights the seriousness of the charged crimes. We all have a responsibility to protect endangered species, both for their sake and for the sake of our own future generations,” stated United States Attorney Lynch. “We will continue to vigorously investigate and prosecute those who illegally engage in trade involving endangered and threatened species.” Ms. Lynch commended the agents and inspectors of the Fish and Wildlife Service for their outstanding efforts in leading this investigation and expressed her grateful appreciation to the United States Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of Pennsylvania, for its cooperation and assistance.

“Illegal ivory trafficking jeopardizes the survival of an imperiled species and undermines decades worth of efforts to conserve African elephants. With this investigation, we’ve shown our commitment to tracking down profiteers who deal in black market ivory in the United States,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agent-in-Charge Amato.

The charges in the indictment are merely allegations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. If convicted, the defendant faces a maximum statutory sentence of 20 years’ imprisonment. The indictment also seeks forfeiture all the seized and sold ivory.

The government’s ongoing investigation into the importation of elephant ivory from Africa into the United States has already resulted in the convictions of eight defendants for federal smuggling and/or Lacey Act violations.

The criminal case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Vamshi Reddy and Claire Kedeshian.

The Defendant:

VICTOR GORDON

Age: 68

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