

MEDIA RELEASE

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PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTOR COLLABORATION RESULTS IN SUCCESSES IN UNRAVELLING ORGANISED WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING NETWORKS

Tuesday, 5 December 2023: The South African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force's (SAMLIT's) illegal wildlife trade (IWT) expert working group (EWG) has released its second report on the subject, and what has emerged is more than just a depiction of financial flows and criminal typologies.

Research conducted during the second phase of the EWG's workstream has demonstrated how critical it is for law enforcement authorities and the private sector to work closely in tackling illegal wildlife trade.

SAMLIT, a public private partnership, established by the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) in December 2019 has since seen several in-depth research projects by its EWGs, with reports published on illegal wildlife trade (IWT), modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT), and corruption. The EWG on IWT was the first to release a public report in November 2021 on the financial flows related to the illegal wildlife trade in South Africa, and now two years later, has followed on with a second report.

"This new report demonstrates our continued commitment to collaborate as an industry to detect and deter the illegal wildlife trade that is a huge threat to our biologically diverse country," said Shelley Brown, chair of the EWG on illegal wildlife trade and Senior Manager, Financial Crime Intelligence Unit, Absa.

"It contains the latest trends, best practices, and actionable insights, making it an essential tool in the fight against these heinous crimes which negatively impact not only our wildlife, but our economy as well."

In the last two years, South Africa has seen the emergence of charges relating to money laundering and racketeering being added to wildlife crime possession and trafficking charges. This reflects the reality that wildlife crime is often part of a more complex web criminal activity associated with organised crime. These additional charges saw rhino horn trafficker Ping Wu handed a five-year prison sentence for money laundering related to rhino horn trafficking in the Tembisa Regional Court on 20 January this year, and Elisha van der Westhuizen handed a suspended sentence by the Kempton Park Regional Court in July 2023 of five years' imprisonment for money laundering related to the trafficking of Sungazer lizards to Germany. And significantly, between April and December 2022, 16 members of a rhino horn trafficking syndicate in Mpumalanga were arrested for money laundering and proceeds of crime charges resulting from a successful integrated investigation.

Colonel Johan Jooste, National Section Commander, Serious Organised Crime: Wildlife Trafficking, in the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation explained: *"SAMLIT is effective because it facilitates open and honest engagement between responsible stakeholders, all of*

whom have a common vision to combat IWT using an integrated approach between law enforcement, government, and the private sector.

“The reason we succeeded with these convictions was due to the paradigm shift to leverage collaboration and be creative in fighting these transnational networks.”

To further enhance the EWG that already included the DPCI, FIC and private sector financial institutions, other role players that joined the EWG in its second phase included the Environmental Enforcement Fusion Centre run by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE), the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and its Asset Forfeiture Unit (AFU), the South African Revenue Service (SARS), as well as non-profit programmes, such as United for Wildlife.

“SAMLIT has played an increasing role in the success of our investigations, and we are very positive about SAMLIT’s continued role in delivering on financial aspects of our National Integrated Strategy to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trafficking,” said Frances Craigie, Chief Director: Sector Enforcement, Environmental Management Inspector, DFFE.

“Many of our high value and priority wildlife crime investigations now include a financial element, and it is very encouraging to see the commitment of this public private partnership to working with us to protect our precious natural resources.”

Pieter Smit, Acting FIC Director, and chair of SAMLIT added: *“It is of critical importance that we keep in our sights the nexus between illegal wildlife trade, the various role players involved in that value chain and the illicit profits generated at each of these touchpoints.”*

“With banks having a close-up view of the transactional environment of many of these actors, they can often see links between wildlife crimes and organised crime, which others cannot. Therefore, it is critical for them to remain vigilant and alert to the exploitation of the financial system by criminals.

“With this vigilance, banks are well-suited to collaborate with authorities by providing valuable and actionable information on the financial activity of those involved in the illegal wildlife trade. This, in turn, plays a critical role in the development of financial intelligence, which law enforcement can use in the fight against illegal wildlife trade.”

SAMLIT is recognised as a leading contributor in bringing financial intelligence to the fight against organised criminal networks trafficking in wildlife, and this report, like the first, will provide new considerations for other public-private partnerships with the same objectives.

“SAMLIT’s expert working group on IWT has been acknowledged internationally by financial intelligence units and public private partnerships as the global benchmark to detect, investigate, and prosecute individuals and networks involved in the illegal wildlife trade. This second report demonstrates their continued willingness to share insights and learnings gained from their recent experience and successes,” concluded Geraldine Fleming, Financial Taskforce Manager, United for Wildlife.

The report is available via this link: [SAMLIT – FIC](#)

[ENDS]

To arrange for an interview, please click [HERE](#)

Notes to Editors:**SAMLIT**

SAMLIT (South African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force) is a private-public partnership between the banking sector and government regulatory authorities, led by the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC). Started in December 2019, SAMLIT is aimed at enhancing collaboration and coordination in combating financial crime, money laundering and terrorist financing. Banking sector partners include domestic and international banks, and banking industry representatives SABRIC (South African Banking Risk information Centre) and BASA (The Banking Association South Africa). Regulatory authorities in the partnership include the South African Reserve Bank's Prudential Authority and its Financial Surveillance Department, as well as the FIC. The partnership enhances the effective, efficient, and timeous sharing of information with a view to improving analytical capabilities of regulatory authorities which in turn assists law enforcement in their investigations and application for asset forfeiture. Through its work SAMLIT also identifies specific types of behaviours and activities associated with different types of crimes. These typologies are intended to increase knowledge on and possibly pre-empt some types of criminal behaviour associated with the banking sector. For any queries about SAMLIT, please go to SAMLIT@fic.gov.za

FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE CENTRE

As South Africa's national centre for the gathering and analysis of financial data, the role of the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) is to safeguard the integrity of the country's financial system and its institutions. In pursuit of this, the Financial Intelligence Centre Act, 2001 (Act 38 of 2001), mandates the FIC to assist in the identification of the proceeds of crime and assist in combating money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing, to facilitate effective supervision and enforcement of the Act. Under this legislation, financial and non-financial institutions are required to fulfil certain compliance obligations, including registering with, and filing various regulatory reports to the FIC. The information provided in these reports forms the basis for the FIC's analysis to develop financial intelligence reports for use by a wide range of law enforcement and other competent authorities, and other institutions to facilitate the administration and enforcement of the laws of the Republic. The FIC Act also sets out the enforcement and penalty regime for non-compliance with the FIC Act. In February 2023, the country was placed under increased monitoring listed by the Financial Action Task Force, the global anti-money laundering and combating of terrorist financing watchdog organisation. Work to address South Africa's grey listing was under way in earnest in 2022/23 and will continue in the coming period. The FIC will continue its contribution in work towards exiting South Africa from the grey list as soon as possible. In the FIC environment, the 2022/23 financial year saw several legislative and regulatory changes being implemented, which speak to some of the concerns raised by FATF. Among them were changes to the FIC Act, and an increase in the types of financial and non-financial institutions required to comply with obligations of the FIC Act. Altogether, these amendments and other measures enable the FIC to source, for interpretation and analysis, transactional and other information from a broader playlist. In this way, the FIC will continue to improve its support in the justice and crime prevention arena domestically and internationally.

For more about the FIC visit www.fic.gov.za

ITEM	2022/23
Total institutions registered as at year end	45 392
Compliance events and attendees	33 events and 16 801 attendees
Compliance inspections	402 FIC and 544 supervisory bodies
Regulatory reports received	>5.3 million
Cash threshold reports received	>4.2million
Suspicious and unusual transaction reports received	558 348
Financial intelligence reports disseminated	2 393 reactive, 976 proactive, 55 on illicit financial flows
Proactive financial intelligence reports disseminated	976, of which 144 related to high priority matters
Value of suspected criminal proceeds frozen	R92.2 million
Value of proceeds of crime recovered, in which the FIC's financial intelligence was used	>R5.82 billion