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The Elephant and Rhino Poaching Crisis Through the Eyes of Yao Ming *A Chinese View of an African Dilemma*

(Nanyuki, Kenya). On August 10th, Yao Ming, China's favourite son, touched ground in Kenya for his first-ever visit on the African continent. Yao is in Kenya to film a feature-length documentary, to experience the beauty and economic importance of wildlife tourism and to learn how this is threatened by the current elephant and rhino poaching crisis, with special support from Virgin Atlantic, Serena Hotels, Elephant Watch Camp, Kicheche Camps and Safarilink.

But he won't just follow the tourist trail he will also go behind the scenes to learn directly from top scientists in the field about the secret lives of elephants and rhinos. Yao will spend time with the world's leading elephant and rhino conservationists and their local staff, such as Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton of Save the Elephants, Richard Vigne of the Ol Pejeta Conservancy, and Daphne Sheldrick of The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, who have all dedicated their lives to studying and saving these endangered creatures.

First he will visit the Ol Pejeta Conservancy where four of the world's remaining seven northern white rhino are under 24-hour protection. He will also witness the operations of anti-poaching patrollers, willing to put their lives on the line as they engage in gunfights with poachers. These individuals are the primary line of defense against poaching. They are a highly trained, tight-knit, brave group of men and women, who will stop at nothing to defeat the poachers killing "their" animals.

Then Yao will visit the Samburu region of northern Kenya with Save the Elephants, where he will learn about long-term behavioral studies that have revealed the intelligence and culture of matriarchal

elephant herds through Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton, one of the world's foremost authorities on the African elephant.

Finally, he will see the spoils of the ivory trade as he visits the ivory room, a graveyard of seized ivory, with the Director of the Kenya Wildlife Service, Julius K. Kipng'etich.

Global trade bans enacted in 1989 (ivory ban) and 1993 (rhino sales bans) resulted in both rhino and elephant populations increasing steadily until the dramatic resurgence of poaching in 2008. Poaching is a life and death struggle as the latest tech and weaponry is engaged against rangers who risk their lives to protect their natural heritage and tourism resource. It is a war with the stakes escalating on both sides

As a WildAid ambassador Yao Ming has been informing, educating and imploring the Chinese public to stop their purchase of shark fin. The audience will join Yao on this journey of discovery to understand the cycle of illegal wildlife trade and its massive impact on the delicate balance of our global ecosystems. He will show us how we can support rhino, elephant and wildlife conservation instead of contributing to their extinction.

For a day to day account of Yao Ming's trip to Kenya, visit his blog on <http://yaomingblog.com/>

To download pictures, visit <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/cadysbe4yypgrow/K7q19etWfl>. All photos are "Courtesy of Kristian Schmidt and WildAid".