

Let's do it again! Hello and welcome back. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. On today's program, a trip to the Philippines, where officials are intentionally destroying things of great value. And a look outside the VOA studios at the National Mall. Recently this large, green area in the central part of Washington, D.C. was covered with ...bones! As It Is ...is on the air.

The Philippine government recently destroyed more than five tons of elephant tusks it had seized. The Philippines is one of the main stops on the travel route of the unlawful ivory trade from Africa to China.

The long, valuable teeth of the elephants were part of a supply collected over 17 years ending through 2009. But this is only about half the amount of what was seized at first. Officials say the search and investigation continues for nearly eight tons of ivory that are missing.

Ramon Paje is the Philippines' Environment and Natural Resources secretary. He says he hopes that destroying the tusks in a very public way will help stop the illegal trade.

"This act is a strong statement to the rest of the world that the Philippines is serious and will not deal with illegal wildlife trade."

Last October, the National Geographic Magazine published an investigative story about the trade. The story, by Bryan Christy, said the Philippines was not just a major transport point for raw ivory. Instead, it reported that the country is also a major buyer of religious objects made from the material.

Mr. Christy gave a presentation about his investigation before the tusk destruction. He said there is very little punishment for the crime of wildlife trafficking.

“Wildlife trafficking is among the most profitable forms, perhaps the most profitable form, of illegal transnational crime because of the penalties. The profits are good. But the penalties are close to zero.”

Mr. Christy noted that in 1989, Kenya burned 13 tons of ivory tusks. At that time, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species banned the ivory trade worldwide. He says the ban worked until the convention let some ivory be sold in Japan in 1999 and again in China in 2008. The reporter says China’s demand for ivory goes along with its rising economy.

The National Geographic investigation found that ivory is mainly used for religious carvings in China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. Mr. Christy says the ivory trade is a 50-million-dollar-a-year industry and may be much larger, because only about 10 percent of the trade has been discovered.

Still, the representative of the Lusaka Agreement Task Force expressed hope about the public destruction of ivory in Manila. Bonaventure Ebayu said it could bring about a bigger change than the one in Kenya in 1989. He said, "This is the first time that a consuming country decides voluntarily to destroy the ivory. It is a stronger message."

Philippine environmental officials say the current price for raw ivory is about 200 dollars per kilogram.

Bones on the Mall

One million hand-made human bones were recently laid out in front of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. The exhibit was a joint effort involving 30 countries and all 50 American states. The showing calls attention to the crime of genocide, the mass killing of people from a national, ethnic, or religious group. Kelly Jean Kelly tells us more.

It started with just one bone, and within a few hours, more than one million bones were laid out on the National Mall in Washington. Thousands of volunteers arranged the symbolic mass grave.

The event was the idea of Naomi Natale, creator of the non-profit organization, One Million Bones. Its goal is to use art and activism to direct attention to genocide.

“It’s really inspiring and humbling to see everybody come together. We’re all dressed in white and we’re laying down bones with the same intention of raising awareness about these atrocities that go on in Sudan and South Sudan and Congo, Burma and Somalia. It’s powerful and I hope that people feel that as they carry these bones and they go to lay them down and that they feel connected.”

Orela Anani felt that connection.

“Just being here today is a symbolic remembrance of why I’m grateful to be alive and why I should pay homage to those who lost their lives because their spirits are with us, as they say, ‘we are one and the same.’”

The bone-laying ceremony was part of a three-day event. The bones were made out of paper, clay and plaster by students, artists and activists all around the world over three years.

Many U.S. communities held bone-making events. Logan McDermott Mostowsky is with Georgetown Day School in Washington.

“I just think it’s really great to honor people who are victims of genocide because people in America, we don’t always realize what’s going on in other countries.”

Jemma Junor made a bone at The British School, also in Washington.

“I feel good that my bone is part of it and that so many people are involved.”

Again, One Million Bones’ Naomi Natale.

“It’s the people in that Capitol that need to see these bones the most and I hope that they’ll be able to come and hear about it and see what our children have made. Our children made this symbolic mass grave.”

Naomi Natale hopes that the million bones laid in front of the United States Capitol will end up in a permanent display as a memorial to those killed by genocide. I’m Kelly Jean Kelly.

And I’m Jim Tedder in Washington. Thank you for spending a little time with us on this, the eleventh day of July. On this date in 1960, one of America’s most famous novels was published. Author Harper Lee’s “To Kill a Mockingbird” won a Pulitzer Prize and went on to become a hit movie.

Also, Bonnie Pointer of the Pointer Sisters was born on this date in 1951. We’ll be back tomorrow at this same time with another edition of As It Is. More Learning English programs are headed your way, and world news at the beginning of the hour.

