**For immediate release**

**Hong Kong ivory ban is now law
WWF says it’s time to close all Asian illegal wildlife markets**

[HONG KONG – 31 January 2018] - A ban on the domestic ivory trade with no compensation by 2021 and an increase in the maximum penalty for wildlife crime offences to 10 years was approved today by the Legislative Council. WWF welcomes the new legislation and would like to thank all the supporters that helped to make this happen.

“A ban on ivory sales with heavier penalties in Hong Kong shows a clear commitment towards the future of African elephants. This will help reverse the trend of elephant poaching and illegal ivory trafficking.” said Cheryl Lo, Manager, Wildlife Crime. Hong Kong is the largest ivory city market in the world and a major transit hub for illegal wildlife trade due to low fines and sentences for traffickers and zero prosecutions of the criminal kingpins.

China closed its legal ivory market at the end of 2017. All ivory trade in the country is now illegal, which may intensify Hong Kong’s position as a preferred market for illegal ivory under the cover of remaining legal traders. The Hong Kong ban will help blunt this trend. There is also evidence that domestic ivory markets in Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Japan, and Myanmar are increasingly catering to visitors from China. Gavin Edwards, Conservation Director said, “This is the time to increase rather than to relax our efforts. With stronger sentences in Hong Kong, law enforcement should take a greater role in joint efforts to investigate and prosecute criminal wildlife syndicates. WWF calls on governments across Asia to follow China and Hong Kong’s lead and close their ivory markets.”

Since 2015, WWF-Hong Kong has been campaigning for a ban on the ivory trade and making wildlife crime a serious crime in Hong Kong. WWF’s report, *The Hard Truth*, revealed several legal loopholes in Hong Kong’s ivory regulations and published a *Feasibility Study on the Ban of Hong Kong’s Ivory Trade* in 2016. Through these in-depth studies on the ivory trade in Hong Kong and various community engagement campaigns, we received enormous public support with 91,643 Hongkongers signing a petition in support of a ban. In response to calls from WWF and other NGOs, the government moved forward with the proposed five-year timetable to end the domestic ivory trade.

\*\* WWF is happy to arrange interviews with our expert on this issue:

**Cheryl Lo, Manager, Wildlife Crime**

**Gavin Edwards, Conservation Director**

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