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United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime



Uganda Opens State-of-the-Art Wildlife and Timber Forensic Laboratory to Strengthen Fight Against Crime

Entebbe, Uganda – The **Uganda Wildlife and Timber Forensic Laboratory** was officially opened on 29 April 2026 at the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre (UWEC) in Entebbe, expanding its mandate to include timber forensics alongside its established work on wildlife crime.

Wildlife forensic science plays a vital role in strengthening law enforcement and ensuring compliance with the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**. Advanced techniques such as DNA profiling enable authorities to turn seized wildlife and timber specimens into scientifically robust, court admissible evidence – linking illegal products to crime scenes and suspects, supporting successful prosecutions, and disrupting organized criminal networks that profit from wildlife crime.

The laboratory builds on a foundation established in 2019, when the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**, in collaboration with the **TRACE Wildlife Forensics Network** and the **Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA)**, launched a pilot wildlife forensic facility in Uganda. Since then, the laboratory has evolved into a national training and technical support hub, assisting hundreds of investigations and prosecutions related to illegal wildlife trade.

Through a UNODC project, **"Combating Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Uganda through the Criminal Justice System,"** funded by the **European Union (EU)** under the **EU-Uganda Forest Partnership and Programme**, and supported by **Denmark**, the laboratory's mandate has been expanded to include **forensic analysis of protected Ugandan timber species**.

Deforestation and timber trafficking are increasingly recognized as forms of **serious organized crime**, posing significant threats to Uganda's environment, economy, and national security. According to Ministry of Water and Environment reports, over the past three decades, forest cover has declined dramatically—from **24 per cent in 1990 to roughly 13 per cent in 2025**—undermining biodiversity, livelihoods, and climate resilience.

The expanded scope of work prompted the relocation of the laboratory to **UWEC's National Wildlife Hospital and Quarantine Centre**, where the facility has been refurbished to enhance security, infrastructure and compliance with international forensic quality standards. UNODC and TRACE, working alongside UWA and the **Ministry of Water and Environment**, are supporting the laboratory with specialized forensic equipment, advanced training, ongoing mentoring and the development of standard operating procedures for wildlife and timber forensic methods.

Speaking at the official opening, **Mr. Giovanni Broussard**, Africa Coordinator for the **UNODC Global Programme on Crimes that Affect the Environment**, underscored the global implications of wildlife and timber trafficking, which are driven by transnational organized crime networks that operate across borders.



Cutting the tape to officially open the Wildlife and Timber Forensic Laboratory.



Amb. Jan Sadek, the Head of the European Union Delegation in Uganda, with rescued pangolin.

By strengthening forensic capacity in Uganda, UNODC is helping to close critical evidence gaps, enhance accountability and ensure that criminals who exploit nature for unsustainable profit are brought to justice.

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Mr. Jan Sadek, Ambassador of the **European Union Delegation to Uganda**, emphasized the strategic importance of the laboratory: "This laboratory represents a powerful



Project partners at the official opening event at UWEC.



Laboratory demonstration at the Wildlife and Timber Forensic Laboratory.

Investment in science, justice, and sustainability. By supporting forensic capacity, the European Union is helping Uganda protect its forests and wildlife, safeguard local livelihoods, and uphold the rule of law against environmental crime."

Mr. Bob Kazungu, Assistant Commissioner Forestry of the **Ministry of Water and Environment**, reaffirmed Government commitment to combating illegal logging: "Science-based enforcement is a game changer in protecting our natural resources. The Ministry is committed to working closely with partners to ensure sustainable forest management and to stop illegal logging at its source."

The event concluded with a renewed commitment to stronger collaboration across the justice, environmental, and scientific sectors.

"When science is applied to the law, the law becomes a more powerful tool for conservation," said **Her Worship Gladys Kamasanyu**, Chief Magistrate of the **Standards, Utilities and Wildlife Court**. "The forensic laboratory is critical to the criminal justice system, significantly enhancing the court's ability to hold offenders accountable by providing objective, scientifically validated evidence and to protect Uganda's natural heritage for future generations."