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## Persuasive Letter Writing: Canada & Global Wildlife Trafficking Law

**Grades:** 6–12

### Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will:

- Be able to **identify the Global Crime Gap** in the current international legal framework for environmental crimes.
- Be able to recognize that letter writing is an important **civic action** in a Representative Democracy.
- Be able to apply the elements of a persuasive letter to compose an argument in support of **international action against wildlife crime (the UNTOC Protocol)**.
- Be able to empathize with the elephants and other species impacted by organized crime.
- Be able to understand what environmental crime is and why it is important.

### Materials

- Note paper and Pens/pencils
- **Resource 1:** Student Data Sheet – UNTOC Protocol Key Facts (Appendix B)
- **Appendix A:** Letter Assessment Checklist (Teacher/Student Tool)
- Optional- Video for older students for background: [History of the Ivory Trade](#)

*Developed by Elephantanatics in partnership with World Elephant Day to support global action against wildlife crime.*

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# Background Information for Teachers: The Global Wildlife Crime Gap

## I. The Problem: Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) is Killing the Planet.

Environmental crime is one of the **largest areas of criminal activity in the world**, generating over **\$100 billion USD** annually, and often funding terrorism and armed groups. This crime category includes illegal trade in waste, illegal logging, and **wildlife trafficking**. Ivory is so valuable on the black market that organized syndicates have been documented using elephant poaching to fund their operations. Currently there is a global treaty on crime through the United Nations Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), but it does not include environmental crime which is the 4th **fourth largest transnational organized crime (TOC)** globally. It is consistently ranked as one of the world's most lucrative forms of crime, often falling just behind **Drug trafficking, Counterfeiting** (or the Illegal Trade in Counterfeit Goods) and **Human trafficking**.

This is not just a conservation issue; it is a serious security and economic crime.

The consequence is tragic and global: **20,000 elephants** are killed every year, pushing the African forest elephant to **Critically Endangered** status. Meanwhile, the **Pangolin**, the world's most trafficked mammal, is being poached at a staggering rate, with estimates suggesting **over one million** trafficked in the past decade for its scales and meat. In Europe, the **European Glass Eel** is now subject to one of the continent's biggest wildlife crimes, fueling **Transnational Organized Crime** networks with an illicit trade valued up to **€3 billion** annually. **Rosewood** is now the most trafficked illegal wildlife product globally—by both value and volume—surpassing ivory, rhinoceros horn, and big cats combined. The value of rosewood exports from West Africa to China was estimated to have surpassed \$2 billion between 2017 and 2022. Wildlife crime affects over **4,000 species** globally and fuels criminal syndicates, underscoring the urgent need for a unified international legal framework.

## 2. Why Wildlife Crime is so Significant

The reason this crime ranks so highly is due to its profitability and complexity, which extends far beyond conservation issues:

- **Low Risk, High Reward:** Until recently, penalties for wildlife crimes were often minor compared to those for drug or arms trafficking, making it attractive to organized criminal networks.
- **Transnational Organized Crime:** Wildlife trafficking is not run by isolated individuals, but by large, sophisticated **Transnational Organized Crime (TOC)** syndicates. These groups exploit weak laws and corruption to traffic animals and plants across multiple international borders.
- **Funding Other Crimes:** Profits from the illegal wildlife trade have been documented funding other illicit activities, including **armed militias** and **insurgency groups**, which destabilizes national and regional security.

- **Global Impact:** Wildlife crime threatens over 4,000 species and poses serious risks to **ecosystem health, economic stability** (by depleting resources vital for local communities), and even **public health** (due to the potential for spreading zoonotic diseases).

### 3. The Global Policy Failure: Gaps in the UNTOC

The size and scale of this crime remain a global challenge because it is treated as a **low-risk, high-reward** crime. Global criminals can move from country to country without facing consistent, serious penalties due to significant gaps in the current international legal framework. The **United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)** is the world's primary anti-gang treaty, but it currently **lacks a specific Protocol** to mandate the serious criminalization of wildlife and environmental crime across all member states.

### 4. The Current Ask – The UNTOC Protocol and Canada's Role

In November of 2023, the Canadian government enacted historic new regulations that severely restrict the import and export of elephant ivory and rhino horn, including banning hunting trophies and requiring permits for nearly all worked items. This was a critical victory, championed by a coalition of groups including Elephanatics (who ran the #IvoryFreeCanada campaign). However, this victory primarily addressed movement across Canadian borders (trade), and the true breadth of global wildlife trafficking syndicates remains a massive, ongoing challenge. Canadians are extremely grateful the Canadian government implemented the new regulations on ivory and rhino horn trade, but we also realize that more still needs to be done at the international level.

**We now encourage the government of Canada to: further consider the merits of an additional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) to support the establishment of a global agreement against wildlife trafficking.**

This new Protocol would mandate the criminalization of wildlife trafficking internationally, providing a critical global tool to shut down the criminal syndicates driving species toward extinction.

**CRITICAL DEADLINE:** This work is urgent. The global decision on strengthening the UNTOC will be reviewed at the [13th Conference of the Parties \(CoP13\)](#), currently scheduled for **October 2026**. Actions taken today directly influence Canada's position and global momentum ahead of this crucial deadline.

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## Lesson Activities

### Activity 1: The Hook: From Local Win to Global Crime (10–15 minutes)

1. **Introduce Successful Advocacy:** Begin the lesson by playing the video from minute 3 – 5:4: [Minister Steven Guilbeault Announces Stricter Trade Measures](#). Use this to show students that a successful advocacy campaign is possible.
2. **Shift Focus to the Global Gap:** Explain that while Canada achieved a victory with new ivory regulations in 2023, that win only addressed **trade** at the border. The current challenge is far bigger: **Transnational Organized Crime (TOC)**.
3. **Introduce the Legal Failure (UNTOC Gap):** Explain that TOC is like a global gang, and the world has an "**Anti-Gang Rulebook**" (**UNTOC**). Ask students: *What if the rulebook doesn't cover one of the biggest crimes?* Introduce the lack of an environmental crime Protocol.
4. **Civic Power:** Explain that students' words have the power to influence Canada's position on this global legal matter.

## Activity 2: Building the Persuasive Argument (15–20 minutes)

This activity is merged for all grades, but older students will execute more complex answers.

1. **Issue & Solution Q&A:** Put the following essential questions on the board. Students will use **Resource 1: Student Data Sheet** to construct answers.
  - a. **What is the problem?** (Transnational wildlife crime is a massive, low-risk criminal enterprise.)
  - b. **What information should we include to show urgency?** (Scale of the problem: elephant numbers, financial scope, threat of extinction.) Draft an outline about an environmental crime issue explaining/persuading why Canada should support/lead on this.
  - c. **What is the specific legal gap?** (The UNTOC Protocol is missing; criminals can move freely.)
  - d. **What is the specific solution/ask?** (We want the Canadian government to support adding a new Protocol to UNTOC.)
2. **Letter Elements Review:** Briefly review the five parts of a formal letter (The Heading, The Greeting, The Body, The Closing, The Signature) and stress that the "**Ask**" must be in the first paragraph.

## Activity 3: Composition and Peer Review (30+ minutes)

1. **Drafting:** Have students construct their persuasive letters, focusing on integrating the **policy solution** (the UNTOC Protocol) with the **emotional impact** (the elephants/wildlife).
2. **Peer Review (Older Students):** Have students exchange letters and use the **Letter Assessment Checklist (Appendix A)** to look for missing elements or areas that could be strengthened, particularly the clarity of the **Call to Action** and the strength of the **Evidence**.
3. **Finalize:** Students make final revisions to their letters.

#### Activity 4: The Action Loop is Complete! (Final 5 minutes)

1. **Targeting:** Provide the students with the formal Canadian addresses. Use the current official title for the Minister of Environment: **The Honourable Julie Dabrusin** (as of May 2025).
2. **Send:** Remind students to place the letter in an envelope and address it to one of the following:
  - **Option 1 (Direct Target): The Honourable Julie Dabrusin, Minister of Environment and Climate Change**
  - **Option 2 (Local Pressure):** Your local Member of Parliament (MP)
  - **Crucial Note: No stamp or postage is required** for mail sent to the House of Commons from within Canada.

Address Format:

[Name of Minister (The Honourable Julie Dabrusin) or local MP]

House of Commons

Ottawa, Ontario / Canada K1A 0A6

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### Appendix A: Letter Assessment Checklist (Teacher/Student Tool)

Criteria	Yes/No	Notes/Score
<b>1. Structure:</b> Contains all 5 parts of a formal letter (Heading, Greeting, Body, Closing, Signature).		
<b>2. Problem Identification:</b> Clearly names <b>transnational wildlife crime</b> and the current <b>legal gap</b> (lack of a consistent global law) as the core issue.		
<b>3. Evidence:</b> Includes at least two factual data points or statistics from the Student Data Sheet (or own research) to support the claim (e.g., \$100 Billion USD, 20,000 elephants/year).		

<b>4. Call to Action (The Ask):</b> Explicitly and clearly asks the government to <b>support the creation of an UNTOC Protocol</b> (or global agreement against wildlife trafficking).		
<b>5. Tone:</b> The letter maintains a respectful, formal, and persuasive tone throughout.		

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## Appendix B: Student Data Sheet – UNTOC Protocol


### Key Facts

**Key data points and arguments to include in your persuasive letter:**

- **Financial Scope:** The illegal trade in wildlife is estimated at over **\$100 billion USD per year**, making it one of the largest areas of organized criminal activity in the world.
  - **Scale of Impact:** Wildlife crime affects more than **4,000 species globally**, ranging from elephants and rhinos to rare orchids and reptiles. This isn't just an elephant problem; it threatens the entire global ecosystem.
  - **The Legal Gap:** Currently, there is **no single global treaty** that requires countries to treat wildlife trafficking consistently as a serious organized crime. The current rules (like CITES) focus mainly on trade, not on prosecuting criminal syndicates.
  - **The UNTOC Solution:** The UNTOC Protocol would require all member countries to treat wildlife trafficking as a **"serious crime."** This classification automatically requires a maximum penalty of at least four years imprisonment.
  - **Deterrence:** By classifying wildlife crime as a serious transnational crime, the Protocol would allow for greater international cooperation, including shared intelligence, extradition, and seizure of criminal assets (money laundering). This makes the crime high-risk for the criminals.
  - **Health Risk:** Illegal wildlife trade increases the danger of **zoonotic diseases** (diseases that jump from animals to humans, such as SARS and COVID-19), posing a threat to global public health and national economies.
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# Additional Resources

## Activity and Media Resources

- [Operation Thunderstorm: Combating wildlife crime](#)
- [Crimes that affect the environment](#)
- [Environmental Crime](#)
-  [ICCWC - About](#)
- Put together a screening for your school or community of the film *The Last Animals* by Conflict photographer Kate Brooks. Information about the film can be found here: <http://thelastanimals.com/about/>
- Visit <https://www.elephants.com/resources> for an age appropriate elephant reading list.

## Policy and Partner Information

- **UNODC World Wildlife Crime Report 2024:**  
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wildlife.html>
- [Canadian Environmental Crime Research Network](#)
- Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime: [endwildlifecrime.org](http://endwildlifecrime.org)
- World Elephant Day: <https://worldELEPHANTday.org/>
- Mara Elephant Project: <https://maraelephantproject.org/>

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