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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

May 6, 2019

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Wildlife trafficking is a multibillion-dollar transnational criminal activity[1] that is both a conservation issue and a security threat. Estimates place wildlife trafficking among the most lucrative types of illicit trade. Wildlife trafficking undermines conservation efforts, fuels corruption, and destabilizes communities that depend on wildlife for biodiversity and ecotourism revenue. In response, the U.S. government has taken steps to combat illegal poaching across the globe, leveraging more than $270 million[2] in funds to undertake a range of activities directly through federal agencies and in cooperation with partners in the field.

Rangers and paramilitary forces tasked with protecting wildlife in often remote parks frequently face violent, heavily armed criminals engaged in poaching. Recent reports, however, allege that partner organizations supported by the U.S. government have played a role in funding and equipping forces that have committed a range of human rights violations – including torture, sexual assault, and extrajudicial killings – in the course of anti-poaching efforts.[3] Among the victims of these alleged abuses are vulnerable indigenous people living near protected areas. Despite the importance of protecting wildlife and preventing species extinction, the United States must not be party to violations of basic human rights.

We request that the Government Accountability Office review U.S. efforts to combat wildlife trafficking abroad and examine in particular:

- What federal funds support partner organizations that engage in or support efforts involving human rights abuses?

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[1] U.S. Government Accountability Office, Combating Wildlife Trafficking: Agencies Are Taking Action to Reduce Demand but Could Improve Collaboration in Southeast Asia (Oct. 2017), *available at* https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/687709.pdf.

[2] *Id.* at 6.

[3] Warren, Tom and Baker, Katie J.M., *WWF Funds Guards Who Have Tortured and Killed People*, BUZZFEED NEWS (Mar. 4, 2019), https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tomwarren/wwf-world-wide-fund-nature-parks-torture-death; *see also* Baker, Katie J.M. and Warren, Tom, *A Leaked Report Shows WWF Was Warned Years Ago Of "Frightening" Abuses*, BUZZFEED NEWS (Mar. 5, 2019), https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/katiejmbaker/wwf-report-human-rights-abuses-rangers.

- To what extent has federal funding for partner organizations supported activities where the reported alleged incidents occurred?
- What protections, guidelines, or controls are in place to prevent partner organizations from engaging in or supporting efforts involving human rights abuses?
- To what extent are federal agencies monitoring the activities of partner organizations to ensure compliance with such protections, guidelines, or controls?
- What enforcement mechanisms are available to the U.S. government if a determination is made that a partner organization is engaging in or supporting improper activities, including human rights abuses?
- What limitations, if any, are placed on the recipients of federal funds to combat illicit wildlife trafficking?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Please contact the Committee on Natural Resources Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee majority staff at (202) 225-6065 and minority staff at (202) 225-7107 to discuss this request.

Sincerely,

Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources

Rob Bishop
Ranking Republican
Committee on Natural Resources