

- [Home Category](#)
- [National](#)
- DENR beefs up inter-agency cooperation to prosecute wildlife criminals

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The Philippines is rich in wildlife and biodiversity, but the country's lax prosecution of traffickers and illegal wildlife traders, not to mention its poverty situation, is making it more difficult for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to protect endangered animals and the world they live in.



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However, the DENR is taking steps to address these issues — and they are not doing it alone.

The department teamed up with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Asian Development Bank (ADB), as well as law enforcement agencies such as the Philippine National Police (PNP), Philippine Army, and many more in order to beef up its mission to protect the country's wildlife.

In an event held at the Ninoy Aquino Parks and Wildlife Center in North Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City on Tuesday morning, these agencies kicked off the celebration of World Wildlife Day 2020 with the theme "Sustaining All Life On Earth."

Atty. Ernesto D. Adobo Jr., Undersecretary for Legal, Administration, Finance, Human Resources and Information Systems of the DENR, revealed that many of the cases they have filed against wildlife criminals often get dismissed because of the unavailability of witnesses.

No matter how strong the evidence they submit are, Adobo said the cases tend to get junked because the people who conducted the investigation are not available.

He highlighted the need to get more people who are highly-trained and disciplined to handle “science-based” evidence, because the details of their cases are very technical.

DENR Assistant Secretary Ricardo L. Calderon cited an example in which it was crucial to identify banned species of wood in a case. Not only did they need a witness to identify these, but they also needed an expert. “Wrong identification can even lead to the dismissal of the case,” he warned.

Calderon added that they are already coordinating with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to increase their personnel. These individuals, he said, will be their “frontline” in different provinces and manage the habitats for biodiversity.

“It is very important that enforcers are more intelligent than the ones committing the crime,” he said.

On the other hand, their partnerships with law enforcement agencies will ensure that they get to check the illegal smuggling of animals being conducted through seaports and airports.

Adobo further expounded that the illegal wildlife trade can be addressed in two fronts. The first is poverty, which they have addressed by providing alternative means of livelihood.

Adobo explained that poverty prompts most people to do things even if these are illegal. “When your stomach is hungry, even the pangolin is seen as food,” he said. Adobo said that many people are exploiting the poverty of Filipinos in order to get access to these endangered species.

The second front is stronger enforcement of law. Now that they have inter-agency cooperation against illegal wildlife trade, Adobo is confident that they are taking appropriate steps to address this problem. “I am really positive it will make our campaign stronger,” he said.

<https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/03/03/denr-beefs-up-inter-agency-cooperation-to-prosecute-wildlife-criminals/>