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Harvard's Center for Geographic Analysis and UNU-IAS collaborate to enhance spatial dimensions of Wildlife Enforcement Monitoring System

The United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) and the Center for Geographic Analysis (CGA) at Harvard University have signed a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at cooperation and collaboration on advancing technologies for online spatial data sharing and web mapping services regarding the Wildlife Enforcement Monitoring System (WEMS). WEMS, a database of wildlife crime developed by UNU, is now being used to support the Lusaka Agreement on Cooperative Enforcement operations directed at illegal trade in flora and fauna.

Effective from 1 October 2011, the agreement facilitates the incorporation of Harvard CGA's WorldMap online database and mapping portal into WEMS. The integration of this rich source of spatial data into the cloud-based information-sharing platform will give the users of WEMS unprecedented analytical power to understand patterns in wildlife crime, not just in terms of location but in concert with the range of socio-economic data present in WorldMap.

The two parties also will collaborate on capacity building activities, including scholar exchange and technical training to incorporate WorldMap into WEMS and enhance its functionality. The aim is to promote research and education on spatial data provision and web mapping applications in Africa.

“UNU-IAS is committed to sharing its knowledge and resources for promoting good governance and capacity building, especially in regards to biodiversity conservation”, said UNU-IAS Director Govindan Parayil. “We welcome the participation of Harvard's Center for Geographic Analysis in the WEMS initiative; it undoubtedly will enhance the capabilities of this exciting project, which uses the power of information and communication technologies to strengthen environmental governance across Africa.”

“It is exciting to see the Center's WorldMap online database and portal taken up in this wildlife preservation project hosted at the UNU Institute of Advanced Studies in Yokohama. Preserving Africa's rich flora and fauna with the help of WorldMap, while also providing the means to analyse and better understand these natural forms in relationship to socio-economic, environmental and other data, is an important part of our broader mission”, said Prof. Suzanne Blier, Allen Whitehill Clowes Professor of Fine Arts and Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of History of Art and Architecture.

With Africa at the frontline of wildlife crime enforcement, the agreement lays the foundation for the enhancement of UNU-IAS's groundbreaking data-sharing innovation with spatial data from Harvard CGA's WorldMap to build governance capacity in combating the illegal trade in endangered species. This will provide the basis for a wide-ranging research agenda in science-policy linkages at this critical time for global biodiversity.

For more information about this Memorandum of Understanding or future plans of the UNU-IAS/Harvard CGA collaboration, please contact Makiko Arima of UNU-IAS in Japan (tel: +81-45-221-2327; arima@ias.unu.edu) or Wendy Guan of Harvard CGA in the USA (tel: +1-617-496-6102; wguan@cga.harvard.edu).

Further details of WEMS and WorldMap can be found, respectively, at <http://www.wems-initiative.org> and <http://worldmap.harvard.edu/>.