



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM

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The Ministry of Environment and Tourism has learnt with concern and surprise about the inaccurate, false reports and the assumptions made in the circulating articles and letters titled "Do not allow trading the lives of rare Desert Elephants for political votes in Namibia".

In this circulating articles and letters, it is alleged that the Namibian Government has apparently secretly proceeded with the sale of hunting permits for elephants in the Kunene Region for the ruling SWAPO Party to get political support from the communities in the region. It is further alleged that elephants in the Kunene Region occur in low numbers, the population is declining and that sex ratio is skew with only 18 bulls of which 6 of them are to be sold for non-trophy hunting.

I would like to bring to the attention of the general public and the international community that elephants occur across the entire north of Namibia with two main subpopulations in the north-east and the north-west parts of the country. In 2004 the total population was estimated at about 16 000 animals, while the current figure after ten years is over 20 000 elephants.

The north-western population is about 4 000 animals and includes the elephants in the Etosha National Park. Elephants are being seen as far south as the Ugab River and in all of the river catchments which flow westwards to the Atlantic Ocean in the north. The north-eastern population is over 16 000 animals. The recent increases are well in excess of normal growth rates. 391 elephants were recently counted in the Kunene Region at a coverage of about 55 % with a biological sound sex ratio.

I further would like to inform the public and the entire community that elephants are able to survive in a very wide range of habitats across the extremes of rainfall in Africa. The elephants in Kunene Region are being referred to as desert elephants because of their adaptation to living in desert conditions and for tourism attractions. They are the same species of elephants which occur elsewhere in the country and scientifically known as '*Loxodonta africana*'.

Strictly speaking there is no such thing called “Desert Elephants”. All our elephants are African Elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) and not Desert Elephants. If there was a concern of a skew in the sex ratio as alleged, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism could have made efforts to translocate some bulls from the north eastern part of the country where they are abundant in numbers to the Kunene Region because they are the same species, but this is not the case. Except for the most extreme desert areas, all of Namibia is suitable habitat for elephants.

Elephants are classified as Specially Protected Game under Namibian law. The original justification for such a listing may well have disappeared as elephants are no longer endangered. Elephants are no longer rare in Namibia, but only potentially valuable.

The current conservation status of elephants in Namibia is more than satisfactory, their numbers already exceed what many would consider desirable for the available habitats and they have been identified as a possible threat to other rare and valuable species which Namibia is trying to conserve. There are no limiting factors preventing an increase in elephant numbers in Namibia.

Although about 17% of land surface of Namibia has been placed in proclaimed protected areas, that only covers 50% of the national elephant range as well as other wildlife species. An increasing proportion of wildlife including elephant range is in communal areas. As a result in 1996, the Government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of Environment and Tourism amended legislation, the Nature Conservation Amendment Act of 1996 (Act 5 of 1996) to allow for the formation of Communal Area Conservancies that gave consumptive and non-consumptive utilization rights of wildlife to rural communities.

In line with the Nature Conservation Amendment Act of 1996 (5 of 1996), the Elephant Management Plan, National Policy on Community Based Natural Resource Management, two elephants are included on the game utilization quota for 2014 for the conservancies in the Khorixas district in the Kunene Region, and Omatjete area of the Erongo Region. The two elephants are shared by the conservancies. Torra and Doro !Nawas Conservancies share one elephant, while Otjimboyo, Tsiseb, Sorri-Sorris and Ohungu Conservancies share another one elephant. These two elephants are for own use and not for trophy purposes and therefore the conservancies can utilize elephant cows as well and are not limited to hunting bulls only. The allocation is also to be utilized for the period of three years, meaning only two elephants will be hunted for that purpose in these conservancies for three years.

These quotas include problem causing animals and the Ministry will only under exceptional conditions consider granting approval that any additional problem causing animal be destroyed.



Communal area conservancies manage about 19 % of communal land in Namibia and thus over 240 000 people live within these conservancies. To date, there are seventy nine (79) registered conservancies that generate over N\$ 40 million from consumptive utilization of wildlife including trophy hunting of elephants, per year.

It should also be noted that Human Wildlife Conflict is also escalating, and in 2013, the number of problem causing animal incidents reported to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism was over five thousands (5 000). In some unfortunate incidents, human lives are being lost due to elephant attacks.

Addressing human-wildlife conflict requires striking a balance between conservation priorities and the needs of people living with wildlife. Elephant-human conflict is not new in the Kunene Region.

It is the opinion of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism that the aggressiveness of the elephants and their new migration patterns inland is an indication of disturbance in the Uchab River, probably caused more by irresponsible eco-tourism and vehicles than anything else.

Namibia is committed to the sustainable use of wildlife resources, as is indeed provided for in our national constitution. Sustainable use of wildlife resources is the result of good conservation and good wildlife management, and it is our collective interest to ensure that we use this resource sustainably.

By now it has become common knowledge that tourism in general and trophy hunting in particular has grown to be one of the most important industry in Namibia in terms of its strong contribution to the Gross Domestic Product, employment creation and the well-being and social upliftment of our rural people.

Namibia's elephant population and the Kunene population in particular, is a healthy and growing population. It is growing at about 3.3% per year. The current levels of consumptive off-take are extremely conservative. They are well below sustainable off-take levels, and the population continues to grow and expand.

There are more elephants in Namibia today than at any time in the past 100 years. One of the reasons for their increase in numbers is that they have a value, communities have rights to manage and use the wildlife, and are starting to earn significant income from wildlife and this is creating the incentives for them to look after and protect wildlife, including elephants, all of which leads to a positive conservation result. Trophy hunting and sustainable use of wildlife is a result of good conservation.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism is also aware of specific Non Governmental Organizations and individuals who are working against the wildlife conservation activities of the Government and sustainable utilization of wildlife

resources by rural communities through the Conservancy Programme. This has negative implications to our Community Based Natural Resource Management which has now been widely regarded as an innovative and successful people-oriented approach to conservation. We have become recognized as a leader in this field. We have restored the link between conservation and rural development by enabling communal areas farmers to derive a direct income from the sustainable use of wildlife and tourism activities.

These specific NGOs and individuals have no research permits on elephants in the Kunene Region or elsewhere in the country. Neither do they have operating agreements or Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of Environment and Tourism on their activities. Any work being done on elephant status in the Kunene Region by these NGOs and individuals is illegal and cannot be relied on. I urge them to refrain from this irresponsible behavior before an action is taken.

The Namibian public and the international community is called upon to ignore these inaccurate, false reports and assumptions on our elephants and sustainable utilization practices.


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Simeon N. Negumbo
Permanent Secretary

