MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM



STATEMENT BY HON. POHAMBA SHIFETA, MP
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AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON ILLEGAL HUNTING OF RHINOS AND ELEPHANTS

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MET HEAD OFFICE, WINDHOEK KHOMAS REGION

Director of Proceedings
Honourable Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Officials of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

We have called on this press conference to come and share with you and the entire nation on the current state of poaching in the country, our actions and future plans to deal with this wildlife crime.

Unprecedented levels of rhino and elephant poaching across Africa, and Namibia is no exception, are being experienced and these threaten the future of these species and the ecosystem they inhabit. This situation demands a review and update of our current strategies and measures to curb illegal hunting. As poaching groups increase in size, number and sophistication, it is more important than ever that law enforcement responses are robust, reliable and effective.

Wildlife trafficking is a million dollar criminal enterprise that has expanded to more than just a conservation concern. The increasing involvement of organized crime in poaching and wildlife trafficking promotes corruption, threatens peace, strengthens illicit trade routes, destabilizes economies and communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihoods.

Ladies and gentlemen, Namibia remain 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, for the benefit of the present and future generations.

We has made tremendous effort and has had significant success stories in biodiversity conservation. An extensive network of National Parks and Communal Conservancies have been established and expanded to conserve its globally significant biodiversity. These are vital tools for conserving Namibia's essential biodiversity including endangered species.

Aligned with Namibia's incentive-based conservation paradigm, the national *Rhino Custodianship Programme* was established in 1993 to facilitate the recovery of Namibia's rhino population while allowing private landowners to become custodians over state-owned rhinos, the right to benefit through ecotourism.

Strategic translocations of black rhinos have been carried out since the mid-1990s by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) under this programme. Wildlife has been moved from areas of high population density in national parks, and later from communal areas and private reserves, to re-establish former rhino ranges. Black rhinos now occur in numerous sub-populations from the Orange River all the way northwards to the Kunene.

These opportunities in turn bring income and jobs for communities in some of the poorest areas of the country. At the same time, the income gained by communal conservancies provide an incentive for continued wise management of wildlife and other natural resources as communities wish to maintain that income flow into the future.

As Namibians, we should therefore be vigilant in preserving our precious wildlife by reporting suspicious activities to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism or the Namibian Police Force.

On the statistics side, Last year, 2014, we lost twenty four (24) rhinos from poaching. This year, sixty (60) rhinos have been poached in the country.
As for elephants, seventy eight (78) were poached in 2014, and twenty three (23) animals have been poached so far this year.

Following an extended period of low wildlife crime in Namibia there is a clear requirement for a strategy to upgrade law enforcement and wildlife crime prevention capacity in the country as well as for immediate action that should be part of, and feed into, the overall strategy.

However, as the Ministry responsible for wildlife protection, we have been working with other law enforcement and conservation agencies to put short and longer-term strategic measures in place to stop the current poaching and illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products. The short and long term measures involve issues of human capacity, surveillance, patrolling and detection.

We have worked and continue to work with the Namibian Police Force and Namibian Defence Force in putting boots on the ground and intensifying our patrols and we continue to improve on this. Today we have the presence of the members of the Namibian Police Force on the ground in Etosha National Park, Bwabwata National Park and Palmwag Tourism Concession Area. Aerial patrols are also being conducted by the Namibian Police Force and the Namibia Defence Force.

As many of our National Parks are surrounded by Conservancies, we are actively conducting joint patrols with the conservancies in curbing wildlife crime, particularly rhino and elephant poaching.

We continue to invest more resources in combating illegal hunting of our rhinos and elephants. The situation can be described as a priority crime and therefore more resources need to be invested in our efforts to stop these illegal activities.

While field patrols remain an essential element of law enforcement operations, if their effectiveness is to be optimized, they need to be complemented by investigations and intelligence led operations. In this regards, we have an active collaboration with the Namibian Police Force in investigating these cases of poaching.

Investigations continue in all areas where we have had the illegal hunting of our rhinos and elephants. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism, together with the Protected Resources Unit of the Namibian Police, has made an offer to the public, that anyone that will provide information that

will lead to the arrest of these poachers of our wildlife in Etosha National Park and elsewhere, will be rewarded with a N$30 000. 00. I want to further inform the general public that we have now decided to increase this reward by double, and anyone that will provide the Ministry or the Protected Resources Unit with that information will now be rewarded with a N$60 000. 00.

For the Etosha National Park and Palmwag Tourism Concession Area cases, we have suspects that we are following, and it is matter of time before they are arrested.

In the North East Regions, we have made a breakthrough in some cases. Six suspects have also been arrested. Other cases are being followed and we are closely working with Wildlife Authorities in neighbouring countries.

We have and we will continue to provide benchmarks that are critical for developing comprehensive, systematic and integrated investigations and intelligence operations for rhino and elephant poaching, and which can make significant contributions to improvements in law enforcement effectiveness.

The benchmarks we are providing include specialized and capable staff mainly through the Namibian Police Force, proficient crime scene management, comprehensive intelligence gathering, efficient data management and comprehensive case development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are in constant discussions with the Prosecutor General with regard to issues related to courts and prosecution thereof. We are working hard to finalize the Protected Areas and Wildlife Management Bill where we are proposing appropriate fines for wildlife crimes. It is our intention and plan to go for public consultation on this Bill before end of June 2015 or early July 2015.

In this regard, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism has established a National Wildlife Protection and Security Committee, which will provide a necessary platform for all stakeholder participation. The Committee brings together the heads or appropriately delegated representatives from all national government agencies, organizations, departments, civil society and other appropriate bodies in regular meetings and gathering to discuss strategic activities, operations and actions addressing wildlife enforcement and compliance.

We also continue to provide communication, education and community awareness programmes, although much is still be done in this regard. Our parks such as Etosha National Park are surrounded by communities and farmers. We therefore need to do more our awareness and education for a better understanding the importance of wildlife and existence of such parks. Communities have a role to play, through their local leadership such as traditional authorities and conservancies, in stopping poaching and combating wildlife crime.

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen, I say enough is enough, these illegal activities on our wildlife species must come to an end. Those involved must stop the illegal hunting of our rhinos and elephants now.

I thank you.