



[Home](#) » [News](#) » [General](#) » BDF hits at police over poaching incident

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Publishing Date : 23 March, 2020

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Botswana Defence Force (BDF) Director, Protocol and Public Affairs Colonel Tebo Dikole has this week slammed Botswana Police for talking and discussing BDF operational matters with the media and members of the public.

Dikole was referring to a new shooting incident that is reported to have occurred this week, where members of the BDF exchanged fire with poachers at Shaile. Asked to confirm nor deny whether the incident took place, Colonel Tebo Dikole said he cannot discuss BDF operational matters with members of the media or the general public.

"Such issues are very sensitive and can constitute national security if discussed with a third party. That police officer who was quoted, we do not know where he got that information. He is better placed to answer your questions," said Dikole. On Monday, March 16, it was reported that five suspected elephant poachers escaped following a fire exchange with members of Botswana Defence Force (BDF) anti-poaching team in the Shaile area of the Chobe National Park in the afternoon.

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This follows another incident where a BDF officer and a poacher was killed when they exchanged fire at the Chief's Island a few days back. In a twist of events, impeccable sources within the military told WeekendPost that the BDF soldiers were ambushed by poachers at their base and instead soldiers ran for their lives. "This is when the exchange took place in broad day light, the soldiers were not on patrol as it is reported," said the source.

Speaking to local media Assistant Superintendent Kenneth Chipisani who is the officer-in charge at the Narcotics, Fauna and Flora Investigations department in Kasane said no soldier in the BDF patrol team was hurt in the shoot-out. He explained that on Monday at around 4 pm, members of the BDF anti-poaching patrolling team who were at Shaile had a sudden confrontation with the poachers and there was serious exchange of fire before the poachers escaped.

"Unfortunately, all the five poachers managed to escape. Again fortunately, none of our soldiers were injured," he said. Assistant Superintendent Chipisani explained that they suspected that the poachers were from neighbouring countries of Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Previously, WeekendPost inquired about the number of members of the Special Forces and Infantry Units currently deployed in the anti-poaching operations at Chief's Island in the Okavango area. The BDF declined to comment on the matter since they considered it "operational matters that cannot be shared with the media and the public."

Dikole has however refuted reports that lapse in anti-poaching mission is a result of disgruntled

members within the military. "The BDF in the execution of its mission of defending Botswana's Territorial Integrity, Sovereignty and National Interests is not driven by the profit or remuneration. All BDF members to include Special Forces performance hinges on one of our core value of 'Duty' which succinctly states that, 'Duty is accomplishing all assigned tasks to the fullest of our ability'," Colonel Dikole said.

"The BDF wishes to underscore the fact that there is a marked difference between BDF members and mercenaries whose prime or sole motivation is private gain, whereas BDF members have been capacitated to put service before self as anything to the contrary would render such an individual not a member of the BDF in good standing".

Dikole said the BDF continues to urge media houses not to mislead the public in the quest for a scoop on anti- poaching operations by attributing increased poaching to supposedly disgruntled BDF members. He said poaching of rhinos in many countries has spiked up because of the astronomically high returns on the value of the rhino horn which is alleged to be around sixty five dollars (\$65 000) per kg in the illegal market.