

Botswana anti-poaching unit returns to arms



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By **Victor Baatweng**

Two years after making international headlines by disarming its anti-poaching unit, Botswana is preparing to give game rangers back their guns.

Information from the government enclave suggest that the Attorney General chambers is already drafting a new piece of legislation that will facilitate re-arming of the anti-poaching unit.

The minister responsible for Environment and Tourism – Philda Kereng on Thursday also confirmed the developments to Parliament.

Responding to a question by Member of Parliament for Maun East – Goretetse Kekgonengile, Kereng said, “My ministry is committed to empowering members of the anti-poaching unit under the Department of Wildlife and National parks to undertake their duties. This includes providing them with necessary resources and equipment including appropriate firearms”.

Kereng also told Parliament that a piece of legislation to facilitate the process of re-arming the anti-poaching unit is being prepared and will be tabled before the ongoing session of Parliament.”

The latest development comes at a time when Botswana has been on the losing end of a protracted battle against poachers who have killed over 36 rhinos and 11 elephants between April 2018 and December 2019.

According to Kereng, Botswana has in recent months experienced a decline in the poaching of elephants as poachers turned their focus on rhinoceros due to high demand for their horns in the far east Asia.

Following the disarming of the anti-poaching unit in May 2018 Botswana has been recording unprecedented rise in poaching activities. The rise has resulted in a clash between the Botswana Defence Force and poachers in the Okavango and Chobe areas.

By July 2020, the army said that a total number of poachers killed since the beginning of 2020 stood at seventeen (17).

Apart from the shoot to kill policy, Botswana has recently decided to dehorn all the rhinos and relocate them to secure, private locations.

The wildlife custodians – Department of Wildlife and National Parks said in addition to dehorning, anti-poaching efforts would be intensified.

The BDF has however admitted that poachers are using sophisticated weapons of war and communication equipment.

“As a professional, prompt and decisive force, the BDF will continue to execute its mission of defending Botswana’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and national interest”, says Colonel Tebo Dikole – Director of the Directorate of Protocol and Public Affairs at Botswana Defence Force (BDF).

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