

Africa

Botswana Parliament Rejects Call to Arm Game Rangers

By Mqondisi Dube

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GABORONE, BOTSWANA - Botswana's National Assembly has rejected a call to rearm its game rangers that was driven by a surge in rhinoceros poaching in recent years. Guns were taken away from the rangers in 2018, but an opposition party lawmaker had moved a motion to rearm the wildlife officers.

Botswana's legislators voted against a proposal brought before the National Assembly by an opposition member of Parliament, Kgoborego Nkawana.

The motion to rearm wildlife officers was defeated Friday, with all ruling party members voting against it.

Nkawana had argued recent poaching incidents necessitated equipping the rangers with guns.

"It is a big loss," Nkawana said. "This would have been an opportunity to save our rhinos and other animals, particularly up in the north. Maybe over time we can see how we can address the government over that issue."

Most of the poaching takes place in the thickets of Botswana's vast Okavango Delta.

Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism Permanent Secretary Oduetse Koboto said the disarmament of the wildlife officers unit in 2018 was not behind the rise in poaching incidents.

"It is not like in the past, the strategy succeeded because there was something different that was done," Koboto said. "It is simply because the environmental conditions changed drastically [in the Delta]."

Koboto said rangers' anti-poaching efforts are focused farther from the Delta, in areas where there is less threat of armed poachers like the Kgalagadi wildlife preserve.

"When it comes to anti-poaching, their [rangers] efforts are largely focused in Kgalagadi," he said. "Those firearms, they had them in Kgalagadi and not in the Delta. This is where I am failing to find the relationship between arms and rhino poaching. Even if they could be having them [firearms] today, they could be sitting with them in Kgalagadi."

Conservationist Map Ives says the fight against poaching needs other interventions, rather than a military approach.

“The war against poaching will not be sorted out by military means alone,” Ives said. “You need to have crime investigators, and intelligence networks need to stretch between countries in SADC.”

Minister of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism Philda Kereng recently said the National Assembly government was reviewing legislation preventing rangers from carrying weapons.

Botswana government officials say rhino poaching has slowed significantly in recent months, after a robust dehorning and translocation exercise.

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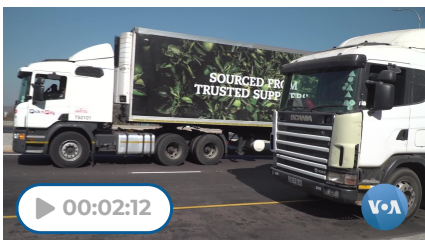
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