

Tenderpreneur pleads guilty to illegal ivory possession

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Elephant tusks PIC. THALEFANG CHARLES



Lebogang Mosikare

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FRANCISTOWN: A tenderpreneur has pleaded with the court to be lenient when sentencing him after pleading guilty to illegal possession of an elephant tusk.

When 36-year-old Gaosego Seipato of Mmadinare village admitted facts that were read to him on Tuesday, he unequivocally admitted that the police who were on patrol for illegal gold miners on May 3, 2019, between Matshelagabedi and the Botswana Defence Force Training Centre, found him in possession of an elephant tusk.

Seipato, who is now domiciled in Matsiloje, also admitted that when the police searched him after he ran away, they found an elephant tusk weighing 5,512kg that he had hidden under his clothes. After the facts were read to Seipato, Chief Magistrate Mareledi Dipate said that he was satisfied that the accused's plea was unequivocal.

"I, therefore, return a verdict of guilty against the accused and convict him as charged," Dipate said. Lano Kgalemang from the Directorate of Public Prosecutions then told the court that Seipato was a first offender. In mitigation, Seipato pleaded with the court to be lenient when sentencing him because he was a first offender.

"I have not wasted the court's time but I pleaded guilty to this offence. I am a law-abiding citizen but I acknowledge that lack of knowledge of the law cannot be used as an excuse before the court. I know very well that the possession of a government trophy without authority to possess the same is illegal. My intention was, however, to take the tusk to the police in Matsiloje," Seipato said.

Seipato then told the court that he is surviving by obtaining tenders from the government, which will suffer if he is given a custodial sentence.

"I am pleading with the court to allow me to complete some of the government tenders that I have won that I am currently doing so that I can continue to support my children. I am asking the court to not send me to jail but at least fine me, which will teach me a lesson in future that if I find a government trophy, I should immediately take it to the nearest police station although I am not downplaying the seriousness of this offence," Seipato pleaded.

The sentence in the matter will be delivered on September 23, 2021.